

I Can See For Miles & Miles

A man with dark, wavy hair and a light beard is looking directly at the viewer. His face is framed by a circular, swirling, and distorted border, giving the impression of a tunnel or a warped lens. The background is a warm, yellowish-brown color with a subtle, repeating pattern of the same swirling shape.

**The Twisted World-View
of
Miles W. Mathis
VOLUME # 5**

Miles W. Mathis

A Random collection of papers from the website of ...the very interesting artist/iconoclast

Volume 5

"This is just my opinion as usual, based on internet research anyone can do."

Miles Williams Mathis is an American artist, poet, writer, self-styled scientist, and conspiracy theorist. He subscribes to quite a number of conspiracy theories, usually by the effect of "X person faked their death", "Y event was a hoax/staged" or "Z is an intelligence asset". Mathis claims to have overturned almost all mathematics and science.

He contends that since at least Shakespeare (who was a committee led by the conspirators), there has been an intelligence conspiracy (of aristocratic families whose genealogy he regularly traces) to dumb people down by making entertainment and/or education crappy or irrational on purpose so that the people who consume it become less logical or rational and thus less likely to oppose or comprehend the conspiracy.

Everything that happened since WW2 was/is a part of "Operation Chaos/Kaos", which is referenced frequently many of his papers. The point is to make people confused, irrational and "turn their minds to mush" so that people don't question physics establishment, resist the conspiracy and buy more things they don't need. You name it, he has a theory about it.

He approaches things from a different angle, asks questions that others don't even consider asking.

Some question whether he is a real person or an entity created by said conspirators to further confuse us. In any case, his suppositions are highly entertaining and educational. After all, conspiracies do abound and things are probably much worse than we dare to think...

pages compiled May 2025

Table of Contents

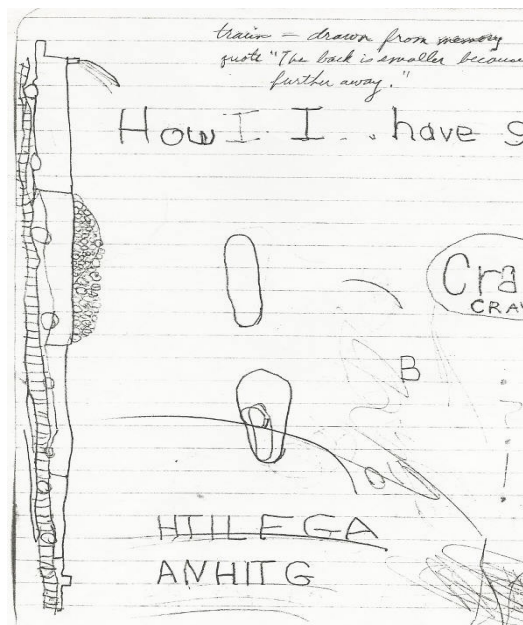
Miles Williams Mathis: an Extended Biography	5
La Guilde de la Blanchepierre	14
THE PRE-PICASSAN BROTHERHOOD	17
The Best Art Writings of Miles Mathis	25
TOP 50 TV SHOWS	29
The Absurdity of Modern Life and Art	36
Alabastre	39
A Note on Triptych Altarpieces	40
ALL APOLOGIES	44
THE 2008 ARC SALON - the second death of realism	48
A Defense of Ashley Olsen	62
Artist's Statement	74
Askmen.com 49 Most Influential Men of 2008	75
Askmen.com 49 Most Influential Men of 2009	79
THE ILLOGIC OF ATHEISM	85
FUTURISM & STUCKISM	96
Of Beavers and other Beasties	101
Summer Sun	109
Blue Blanket	110
Blue Couch	111
A REVIEW OF BO BARTLETT AT FORUM GALLERY	112
THE 75 GREATEST BOOKS EVER WRITTEN	130
Claudio Bravo	141
Sleeping Nude	145
Canal Bridge, Bruges	146
BUDDHISM: the stronger poison	147
THEATER OF THE ABSURD	158
THE BUSINESS OF ART	165
Mia with Cameo	170
A Review of John Carey's -What Good are the Arts?-	171
The Greatest Irony	177
CHANNELING THOREAU AND TWAIN by channeling George Carlin	182
The Castle Minnewater, Bruges	187
A Flamewar with Rob Howard	188
Censored by Yahoo	196
Choosing a Subject - Part I	198
Choosing a Subject - Part II - The Nude	204
Pencil Profile 2020	209
PRINCE GIMMICK	210

The Lastman in Comedy	216
The Value of Copywork	222
Curran Again	231
Dante contra Danto	243
Arthur Danto	247
DEFAMATION	253
A Reply to Maureen Dowd	256
A Review of Tim Eitel -and Pace Wildenstein Gallery-	263
The Many Failures of Modernism	273
The Fundamental Theorem of Modernity - and why it is false	284
An Art Experiment	304
My 100 Favorite FILMS	306
Fired by ARC	314
A Letter from the Front	319
BALLS IN A BASKET	326
The Future of Art	333
Art in the Past	336
ART NOW	339
The Rise of the Gallery	343
In the Garden	357
The Garden Gate	358
Clement Greenberg	359
The day after Groundhog Day will never be the same	366
ON ELIZABETH GILBERT	373
The Fall of the Gallery	379
Conversations at Goodart	390
Hughes at the -Guardian-	400
The Titanic: The Fraud That Keeps On Giving	403
Miles Mathis blurb	452

Miles Williams Mathis: an Extended Biography (for the curious as well as old friends)



Although some believe he may have been hatched from an egg deposited in mysterious ways in the 19th century or cloned from the fingernail clippings of a Florentine Fra, trusted paperwork informs us that Miles Williams Mathis was born in Amarillo, Texas, on the 17th of September, in the wee hours of the morning. Scant months later, we imagine, he must have ventured from his swaddling clothes and stuffed animals, upon hands and knees, muling and burbling, in search of his first crayon.



In hindsight, his earliest claim to an artistic future would appear to be a train drawn with perspective when he was four years old.* The drawing was saved and his mother dated it and wrote on it this exchange: (Mom) "But Miles, why is the caboose smaller than the engine?" (Miles) "Because it is farther away." Miles' parents were not artists and he had not been taught perspective, so this was not a leading question.

When Miles was four the Mathis family moved to Lubbock, Texas. In grade school he was remembered by classmates for his wall-size dinosaur and evolution murals, his Peanuts cartoon copies, his perfect signature forgeries, his very animated singing in choir, his pretty girlfriends, and his vast time in the hall and in the principal's office. He distinguished himself even more for F's in citizenship than for A's in everything else.

Having skipped first grade and being a year younger than everyone else, he entered puberty late compared to his classmates and was left behind socially in junior high. The pretty girlfriends were no more. This gave him time to get involved in just about everything else. In junior high he became disenchanted with art classes and never took another one. Instead he joined the band and the choir, the tennis team and the golf team—in short, became a nerd. His posters helped a best friend (who carried a briefcase) become student body president, and the nerds temporarily ruled.

As a young teenager Miles was one of the top junior golfers in the state, winning many regional tournaments. [He shot a 76 at age 12, on a course he had seen only once.] He also won several local tennis tournaments. In this period he became a fledgling wildlife artist, beginning by copying Clark Bronson drawings when he was 11, moving on to drawing from wildlife photographs in magazines like National Geographic and finally working from his own photographs and from nature.



Miles attended Monterey High School and excelled in many areas there. He won several UIL science medals, was twice first chair all-region band {tenor saxophone}, won awards with the jazz band, was a finalist in writing contests, and was chosen to design various visual items (such as prom invitations, tickets, and brochure covers) despite not being in the art classes. In addition, he was the national Latin champion for two years. As a senior he won the JCL scholarship from the state committee of classics. He was also a National Merit Scholar and won the local National Honor Society Scholarship. He

should be remembered* by the takers of the PSAT, 1980, for questioning one of the answers on the math portion. The PSAT admitted its error and was forced to change all scores nationally. Miles' score [as a senior]: 68/78:214.

He turned down several scholarship offers in engineering, including to Rice and the University of Texas, instead choosing to study liberal arts at Haverford College. Unhappy there [see end of paper in link], he followed a girlfriend to the University of Texas, Austin, after only one semester. He immediately tested out of a year and half of classwork, including 16 hours of Latin. He had 82 hours of credit before he started his second year. Taking a bit of a breather, Miles loaded his schedule with PE credits like diving, gymnastics and ballet. He was soon tapped by his ballet teacher to join a local company, where he danced for two years, including a minor role in *Sleeping Beauty*. He also began publishing a comic strip with the *Daily Texan*, one of the largest and best student papers in the country (and the breeding ground for such cartoonists as Berke Breathed, Sam Hurt, and Chris Ware—in 1980 Breathed had just taken his student strip *Academia Waltz* into syndication as *Bloom County*). Miles' strip *Squib* was published for three years to wide acclaim and national awards before being picked up for syndication by King Features as part of *The New Breed*.

Meanwhile, Miles reached the end of his second year only 9 hours short of a degree. In the fall of 1982 he had applied for a Rhodes Scholarship, but having just turned 19, he was told by the committee to wait another year and try again. Unimpressed with the committee—whose chairman was later fired for faking his resume—Miles declined. Rather than take the 9 hours in summer school and graduate at age 19, Miles decided to tour Europe on his bicycle that summer with his younger brother. Landing in Frankfurt, they rode south to Italy through the Black Forest and over the Alps. In Rome they turned back to Paris and eventually closed the circle to Frankfurt, with many a mishap along the way—including the younger brother's Vespa crash in Rome and Miles' impact with a car door in Sienna.

Miles' senior year was a very light load of conference courses in Latin and philosophy (and some sitting-in on graduate courses). He wrote his paper for Special Honors in philosophy for Paul Woodruff on Plato, and also won the Matchette paper contest with an entry on post-existentialism. He graduated summa cum laude with keys from both Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies.

A summer of cartooning, dancing with the ballet, and being a disc jockey at a local club was not enough to impress the parents, and he bowed to their pressure to enroll at the LBJ School of Public Affairs in the fall (a law school compromise, basically). The LBJ School, along with Georgetown in DC, was one of the top two public affairs schools in the country at the time. Miles was given a full merit scholarship, and he landed an in-demand class with Barbara Jordan his first semester. But, unimpressed with the curriculum and feeling out of place, he returned his scholarship money and set himself adrift. While continuing to cartoon, dance, and ride his bike, he moved from one short-term job to another, including waiting tables and being the Children's Summer Series coordinator for the Austin Symphony Orchestra. Finally, finding the comics page to be even more obsolescent than painting, he drifted to the latter, slowly developing a new course of auto-didacticism.

In 1986 the great Spanish portrait painter Joaquin Torrents Llado came to Austin to paint the Governor's wife. Miles saw a show of his work and immediately made his acquaintance. Soon he was invited to watch the master paint, and it was here that the torch was passed. Miles had found a living mentor, if only for a few hours.

In 1987 Miles began copying from the old masters, at first from books and then making trips to museums. His first museum copy was a Sargent at the Dallas Museum of Art, where he was the first copyist in history. Until Miles asked for permission, the DMA didn't even have a policy. He was at first denied permission, since the curator didn't know what to do in the event. The director finally relented, and some four hours later Miles was done, having learned what he came to learn. A similar encounter did not turn out so favorably at the Kimball in Fort Worth, where Miles wanted to copy a Van Dyck. He was refused, the museum's policy being no copywork due to the size of the museum. The Kimball claimed that the copyist would block foot traffic, but of course this poses no problem in the more crowded museums of Europe—where tourists seem to enjoy seeing copyists.

Miles next went to the San Antonio Museum of Art, where the staff were much friendlier and accommodating. There he copied a detail of Bouguereau's *Admiration*.



In 1990, Miles won the Basil Alkazzi Award to travel to London, where he did copywork at the Tate Gallery (now Tate Britain) and the National Gallery. At the Tate he copied a detail of Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* in oil and copied a detail of Millais' *Ophelia* (above) in pastels. The Sargent copy—like the one in Dallas—took about four hours, and he turned down several buyers on the museum floor. One tourist said he thought the copy was better than the original (Miles disagreed strongly). Another laughed and said that Miles must be Sargent's ghost, just remembering what he had already done. The museum curator liked the copy so much he offered to hang it on his office wall to dry while Miles went to Oxford to copy at the Ashmolean. Miles gladly accepted, though he doubted that this was standard procedure with copyists.

At the National Gallery, Miles failed to get permission to copy in oils. One must jump through a whole series of time-consuming hoops there, including offering referees. So he decided to copy Van Dyck's *Cornelius van der Geest* in pastels. This was also strictly against the rules, but Miles worked so fast that by the time the guard noticed him he was finished. The guard came over to complain and Miles said, "OK, done! Bye!"

At the Ashmolean, the Christofano Allori he had come to copy was hung too high to see without glare. So Miles again played cat and mouse with the guard, standing on a forbidden chair to take a forbidden picture.

On this trip Miles also stopped in Windsor to see the picturesque town and castle. Having his sketching materials with him, he climbed a ten-foot iron fence on the back lawn to sketch the queen's horses in their royal blankets. The guards did not appreciate the novelty of this, and they chased him through the streets of Windsor with their whistles blowing. He was caught (with a copy of Thoreau's Civil Disobedience in his backpack) and severely reprimanded, but ultimately let off with a warning.

Tired of the big-city rigamarole and the police chases, Miles escaped to Dorset to finish off his scholarship money. Going to Evershot, home of the Tess cottage, Miles was let off the train at a "request only" stop in the middle of a field, where he had to hike ten miles into town, over hedgerows and through fields of bluebells. He felt lost in a scene from *The Woodlanders*, until a nice lady in a tiny Mr. Bean car helped him with his easel and canvases over the last stretch of highway, and saved him a little legwork. In Evershot he stayed in a loft over the butcher's and had dinner with the pretty gardener across the street. She introduced him to the next door neighbor, who paid him 50 pounds to draw a small pastel view of his thatched-roof house.

Other art trips to Bruges, Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, Paris, Goteburg, Rome, Florence, and Venice were equally enlightening if somewhat less "disobedient." Miles never seemed to learn a respect for authority however, as he was ejected from the Cathedral in Vienna at Christmas mass in 1999 for wearing a stocking cap (after a nasty look from the Cardinal himself).



In his defense, he tells me it was about 2 degrees celsius that day inside the church, and many old men no doubt died of consumption that week from attending the service (only the women were allowed common sense, and fur caps). Miles has always been a strong defender of feminism, including all that it requires in a full and logical implementation.

From the beginning of his career Miles has been the subject of both admiration and conflict. At an early show in Lubbock, Miles removed his work from the walls with his own hands after abnormalities in judging, even though he was a multiple award winner. He has given a tongue lashing to judges at the Akron Society of Artists, ASOPA and the National Sculpture Competition, among others. In Austin he was the go-to person for dissenting commentary on art in the newspaper: no one else wanted to go on record contradicting the status quo. For his opinion on the AIDS "Day Without Art" he was banned from some local businesses, and once wore a scarlet letter A when being asked to leave one of them. He also spoke out strongly against local architecture and architects, and the opposition in one of these skirmishes secretly changed its media presentation in response to one of Miles' letters to the editor. More recently he has become notorious for his attacks both upon the avant garde and upon the new realists, including the directors at the Art Renewal Center.

His letters have amused and exasperated editors at many of the major newspapers and magazines in the US (and more recently in the UK). An especially strong letter to *Antiques and Fine Art* had the appearance of bringing the magazine down altogether, as it folded soon afterwards. Time and again Miles' strongly worded rebukes and exhortations have caused people at many different levels and from many different backgrounds to reassess their positions. No longer can the leading critics publish facile opinion uncontested. There is a daemon lurking and they now know it.

In 2003, Miles sent a letter to the London newspapers, criticizing the decision of the Tate Britain to allow Rodin's *The Kiss* to be wrapped in string by a contemporary artist. He recommended that London realists storm the museum with scissors. The letter was printed in full by the *Independent*, and less than two weeks later a London artist was arrested for cutting the strings off the sculpture. He was not charged.

For the first time in decades, the left has serious opposition from within its own ranks. The Art Renewal Center hired Miles to attack the left, not realizing that he was the strangest of bedfellows. Had they known that they had hired a former worker for Earth First, a card-carrying member of Greenpeace, and a campaign worker for Ralph Nader, they would surely have been kept up nights. Miles learned to write by reading Thoreau and Wendell Berry, so it is unlikely that he would share the political views of the neocons. Miles' readings of Nietzsche—another mentor—had steered him not to Ayn Rand and Social Darwinism, but to an artist-centered theory of art that would turn out to be a truly extraordinary stance at the end of the 20th century. This stance has allowed Miles to critique both the left and the right from a position of unassailable power: a stance of power since it is ultimately futile to deny that the artist is the primary hand and voice of art. Only another artist could logically have the standing to refute him, and no true artist would do so. What artist would argue that non-artists should control art?

In 2000 Miles moved to Amherst, Massachusetts, where, snuggled in among the five colleges, he began his serious scientific studies. He had majored for a short time in physics and astronomy at UT Austin, where he impressed his professors with a very quick mind. In his first course in physics, one designed to weed out the weak, the class average was 52. Miles ruined the curve with a 100. In astronomy it was the same: Miles had the high average among all the large first-year classes. This was reminiscent of high school, where the calculus teacher had a longstanding trick of asking all his second-year algebra students a pre-calculus question, a leading variant of the problem Newton and Leibniz were working on when they invented the calculus. No one had ever answered it correctly. Miles did.

He had also kept up his readings in science since college, although this consisted mainly of updates on the latest theories. But, unsatisfied with the direction these theories were taking, Miles finally began studying the history of theoretical physics in earnest, especially as it related to classical mechanics and basic physics. He bought a small library of old books like Newton's Principia, Euclid's and Archimedes' treatises, Maxwell's papers, and all of Einstein's original writings. He also brushed up on his calculus and began looking into the origins of that math. This ultimately led him to Cauchy and Cantor, set theory, topology, physical chemistry, cosmology, and several other subfields, which he investigated to whatever ends he was following at the time.

His galleries now full of paintings (and selling quite slowly), he was free to write papers of his own. In the ten [now twenty] years since, Miles has written many books worth of papers, all of which investigate mathematical anomalies within broader physical theories or higher maths. These papers are published on a website linked to his art website as well as at a larger online journal devoted to dissenting opinion in physics (Walter Babin's alternative journal, where Miles got ten million hits in the first two years). Since the first of these papers concerned Relativity, and since Relativity is considered by the status quo to be a closed and finished field, Miles' papers have been censored and slandered by the universities. Some university professors are beginning to take note, however. The current theoretical wall in physics has led even some top names out of standard channels, and a few appear to be trolling the internet for new possibilities. Miles has been contacted by several professors worldwide, [recently added: and in 2010 he was contacted by an astrophysicist at NASA and Johns Hopkins, who recommended he publish in book form ASAP. This NASA scientist even offered to write the introduction, and Miles' first physics book came out in the summer of that year. Another reader offered to bankroll his second book, which came out in late 2011. A third was published in 2013 and a fourth in 2017. In 2015 his paper on the Gravity Wave announcement caused a major stir in academia, ultimately killing the story and possibly preventing a Nobel Prize. Other papers have sent similar ripples through mainstream physics, and Miles has now been called by some the most revolutionary voice in science. He lays claim to the title of being the first professional artist who has had a book on theoretical physics recommended and introduced by an Oxford-graduate and NASA physicist.]



Montalivet, France

In 2004 Miles moved to Bruges, Belgium, a preferred retreat. In this true artists' town, where stand statues to Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling (and the mathematician Simon Stevin), Miles could retain equilibrium while fighting on a thousand fronts. Solace in the form of silent swans and brooding canal bridges and rooftops glistening from a recent rain were always but a few steps away, out his green door. The finest chocolate and beer in the world could remove him instantly from the messiest squabble, keeping his faced unlined and his eyes bright and his brush hand (the left) steady.

Also calming is his piano, which he plays almost daily. After a year of lessons when he was 12, Miles waited 20 years to take up the instrument again. At that time he began teaching himself what would be considered an impossible repertoire for someone with one year of childhood training. Remembering only Bach's Minuet, he jumped immediately into Debussy's *Claire de Lune*. With that under his belt he added *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair* and *Reverie*, then Ravel's *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, Liszt's *Consolation #3*, Schumann's *Romance #2* and *Of Foreign Lands and People*, Tchaikovsky's *Seasons*, Rachmaninov's *Prelude in G*, Satie's *Gymnopedies*, a couple of Chopin *Etudes*, and many others. Some of these pieces are beastly difficult in timing, but none are especially fast (except perhaps parts of *Claire de Lune*).

In the winter of 2007, while on vacation in Spain, Miles solved what has been billed as the oldest surviving math problem in the world. Travelling like an Amishman, with no phone, no laptop, no reservations, and one pair of pants and shoes, he was in a position to let his mind wander, which was the whole point. Not seeing Mardi Gras coming, he arrived in Cordoba with no booking and spent the night in a carpark. But this also only encouraged fresher thoughts. By the time he made it to the naturist beach in Vera Playa, his brain had been well-primed for real work. Bored with the blowing sand and the fat naked Germans denting the dunes, he dove into the internet cafes to take solace with his papers. He took up an old paper on Goldbach's Conjecture he had worked on for a few weeks several years earlier and attacked it furiously, refusing to let several bouts of bad math deter him. After a few days he had discovered the secret, and re-surfaced with a simple proof that can be understood by any good reader. Somewhere, distant towers were swaying once again.

Also in 2007, Miles finally got around to working with a gallery in Bruges. There you can find several oils and pastels. Miles also works in clay and bronze sculpture, and occasionally develops his own photography prints. These are normally hand-toned 11x14 inch prints of pictures he takes of his painting models, in the same sessions in which he paints. Many but not all of these are nudes. He has offered a whole book of his photographs of the young model Tess to various publishers such as *Aperture*, with no success. These will have to wait for a future release, like the photos of Reverend Dodgson or Julia Margaret Cameron.

Added later: Since 2013 Miles has also become known as the foremost fake-events researcher on the internet, blowing the cover of literally hundreds of major stories throughout history, all the way back to the Crusades. In 2013, his art counter-criticism morphed and expanded into a more general historical criticism, taking him into areas never before tread by an honest researcher. Discovering at that time an admission by the CIA that they had been in control of Modern Art all along, Miles finally put 2 and 2 together, seeing that most of accepted history had been managed in a similar way. This led to a linking of his art criticism and his science criticism, since he proved that both art and science—and everything else—were being managed by the same people for the same reasons.

By 2017 his two websites had gone viral, creating a worldwide stir in several fields. Many of the papers on the science site rank on the first page on a Google search on their general subjects, and several outrank Wikipedia and Dictionary.com. In 2018, the London Daily Mail published his research on Stephen Hawking, showing Miles was correct. In 2018 and 2019, the mainstream has admitted he is correct on several other major subjects, which has turned out to be very embarrassing for mainstream physics. The entire field is now in disarray.

In 2020 he became the first person in history to successfully predict a Solar Cycle. Those in the mainstream were so upset by this they actually called in the Air Force to take over sunspot reporting. Which the AF did by promptly faking all numbers. At about the same time Google was called in to censor both of his websites, removing his listings from the front pages worldwide. We know they did that because Bing and Yahoo didn't, where Miles' papers continued to outrank Wikipedia, Britannica, and the Dictionary. This is another major first, since no unaffiliated private site had ever outranked those places on a general search.

*My most annoying critics have decided to attack this bio in these two places. So I later added this scan of the original document as proof of my train story. As for the PSAT, notice my wording. We say I should be remembered for doing this. Some people in Lubbock may remember this episode, since I told my brainy friends I had written a letter and they were happy to get the extra point or two. They then told their friends. This bio is written "for old friends", see above. My critics now tell me this was written up nationally, which I never knew until they dug it up. They say I imply that I was written up nationally for it, but I don't say that, do I? If I had known at the time it was nationally reported, with students given credit, I would have followed up and asked why I wasn't given credit. But I didn't. Possibly my letter wasn't one of the first received, or they didn't like my wording, who knows? But you have to ask why my critics would choose this as a talking point. Are they implying I wasn't smart enough or combative enough to do such a thing? Are they saying it doesn't fit the rest of my bio, which is easy to verify? It fits it perfectly doesn't it, including all the stuff I have done as an adult. I am exactly the sort of person who would do something like that, and did do it. You can see all the letters to the editor I later wrote, complaining of every injustice in the world. Given that I soon became a National Merit Scholar, summa cum laude, and Phi Beta Kappa, and have since corrected Newton and Einstein, I should think my intelligence would have been proved. The PSAT story has been made moot in that regard, and we didn't include it to prove my intelligence. We included it as another bit of color, something my readers would be interested in: which most of them are. So as usual, my critics just make themselves look like jealous little boys, desperately looking for some way to tear me down.

Original story compiled by Marie-Claude Lacroix, formerly of Cirque du Soleil and boleadoras performer extraordinaire.

La Guilde de la Blanchepierre

(The Guild of the White Stone)

In 1997 the painter and sculptor [Van Nielsen](#) and I shared a studio in Austin, Texas. It was a white stone house from the 1920's surrounded by ancient oaks in the oldest part of town. I had several pieces of Carrara marble that I had shipped over from Italy in 1994, and one of these sat on the front porch for a couple of years, waiting for me to take chisel to it. Van finally tackled it, covering the porch and yard with shiny white chips. I also loaned him a small block of Yule marble from Colorado, which he also peppered the front yard with, finally discovering a nice torso within.

At about the same time, I was reading a biography of Lewis Carroll. Carroll distinguished very special days in his journal by giving them a white stone. His boating party with Alice was one of these days, of course.



drawing by Arthur Rackham

In the 1990's I also had an Alice. Her name was Tess, and I did some 50 drawings, paintings and sculptures of her in that decade. She was seven when her mother, one of my agents, brought her over to the studio by chance, and I understood that I had been sent a gift by the Muse. You can see her all over

my portfolio.

At any rate, I realized what a lovely image the white stone was in Carroll's biography, and also saw how the motif was repeating itself in the environs of our studio. When Van and I decided to form a guild and to start a small school in 1998, we tossed around several ideas for a name. We liked the idea of a Brotherhood, but decided it was a bit too Pre-Raphaelite, not to say unencouraging to any women who might be up for Master status in the future. We also played with some synonyms of "renaissance" and "rebirth" (like everyone else). The best was probably *The Recurrence*, giving a nod to Nietzsche. But this was not memorable enough. A bit vague. The term I had used for my first book on counter-criticism, *Zeitgeber*, was dismissed as too hard to pronounce. It was already stretching it to use it as a non-German book title; as the name for a movement it was a little too arcane. We needed something just odd enough to catch in the mind and in the eye of the intellectual, but not so odd that it just ricocheted off the mind of the public. Spanning this bridge is not as easy as one would think, and many will think we still haven't managed to cross the water without getting a dunking. I suppose only time will tell. Who would have thought that fairly normal people would get used to saying "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood"?

I have remained adamant about keeping the French title, rather than just the translation (although both are nice), because I feel that French is somehow less intimidating than German, even to Americans who don't know a word of either. Some will recognize the "zeit" from *zeitgeist*, and so *Zeitgeber* will not be totally unfamiliar. But *Blanchepierre* is even more familiar, since most know that *blanche* means white. Pierre is equally familiar as a guy's name. Beyond this, *blanchepierre* is just one of those words, so common in French but uncommon in German, that rolls off the tongue. You get a feeling that it is an artistic word even if you don't know what it means. It is like *blanchefleur* (white flower): a word just made for Troubadours. In fact, *blanchepierre* didn't occur to me until I was researching *Tristan and Isolde* and ran across the name *Blanchefleur* in the knightly tales.

Van and I finally settled on the name after a trip to Bruges, Belgium (where I now live). Bruges is actually Flemish, not French, but it is the Medieval city nonpareil, the stones still exhaling the ghostly breath of Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling, and of pale maidens draped and hooded. These ghosts haunt the foggy canals at night in the forms of white swans, shining dully in the gloom.

Even now, the imprint of the French is strong in Bruges. The College of Europe in Bruges teaches in French and English, not in Dutch or Flemish. So if we have chosen French for our guild, you will have to forgive us. Besides, the Flemish does not have quite the same poetic appeal: *De Gilde van de Witsteen*.

Addendum: Several readers have written in asking about a manifesto for the guild. This is my answer to one of them.

I feel it is almost redundant to publish a manifesto since everything I have written (and that is lot) could be seen as a manifesto of sorts. No one with any curiosity can be confused about how I stand on just about any issue related to art. Besides, I have a kind of aversion to manifestoes. There is something unforgiveably claustrophobic about them. I don't know why. An art guild is always little more than a name and a group of works anyway. If the works don't express the movement, nothing will. Besides, all my writing is not really a manifesto, it is a defense. My writing is not the creation of a theory, but the destroying of all theory that gets in my way as an artist.

Those who really need a manifesto can use my introduction on my homepage as one. There I throw down the gauntlet as well as anywhere.

[Click here](#) to read an article on the precursor to the Guild of the White Stone, the Pre-Picassan Brotherhood. This was the working name of the guild in 1999, when Laura Alport wrote this article for a local paper. She was told the language was too "avant garde" and it was never published. Ironical that.

THE PRE-PICASSAN BROTHERHOOD



by Laura Alport

Sometimes things still happen. I stood, watery drink in hand, outside the main circle of conversation at an unexceptional party in a nondescript house in a town not known for its art. Why? Why indeed, and very broadly. A sheet of noise reflecting from every surface—the too-close walls, the humming glasses, the enameled and polished things all about—hemmed me into myself, and I fell back behind my eyes, alert but ineffable. I may have swayed slightly, I don't know. Suddenly, impinging softly on one of my outer meridians, a strange voice. Someone nearby was quoting van Gogh. I heard through the tintinnabulation of lesser voices, "Better a little wisdom than a lot of energetic zeal." Do I yet dream? I slipped around the corner into a dim hallway—an ell of Hypnos, perhaps—and found myself directly behind two blondish eidola, seraphic bookends, in heated dispute with half a dozen others on the subject of modern art. One of them had raised the ghost of Vincent, supposedly one of the fathers of Modernism, to completely dismantle the modern theories of his antagonists. The listeners were dumbfounded. As intellectuals, they were clearly accustomed to browbeating anyone foolish enough to broach this subject. One of them began,

"But Foucault thought...."

He was immediately interrupted with, "What was it that Foucault painted, again?"

He answered, "Nothing that I know of, but...."

"Let's leave him out of it then."

My eyelids danced and my fingers trembled without volition. Somewhere a chorus mouthed a weird chantey. A few minutes later the two guys left, and I asked someone, "What just happened? Who

were they?"

"The Pre-Picassan Brotherhood."

"No, really."

"*Really*. They think they're the saviors of art or something. Big deal."

My informant here was clearly a hostile witness. A fan of Duchamp or Damien Hirst. So I did my own work. Intrigued, I tracked down the "Brotherhood." Honestly, I expected to be disappointed. I usually am. In this age of gimmickry and technical shoddiness, one becomes jaded.

From the street the studio appears unimpressive. An old stone house in an unkempt yard draped by low-hanging trees and knee-high grass. But inside it is like a step back in time. The smell of turpentine and rabbitskin glue. Bags of rich red clay and muddy wooden tools. Fine linen canvases primed with white lead, or birch panels layered with chalk gesso. No interior latex here. No broken plastic dolls. No industrial gadgetry being rewelded or collaged. Nothing being quoted or hypertexted. No animal corpses or back issues of ARTnews. Not even a TV, not anywhere.

On the walls are oil paintings, watercolors, pastels, and charcoal drawings. Other works framed and unframed line the baseboards four and five deep. On every available horizontal surface sits a figure in clay or plaster or bronze. I have forgotten at times that art is still possible.

The Pre-Picassan Brotherhood is Miles Mathis and [Van Nielsen](#). Everyone assumes at first they really are brothers, as I did, but they are unrelated. In fact, they are eleven years apart and from different states. Mr. Mathis is 36, a Texan. Mr. Nielsen is 25, and is from Colorado. But like fraternal twins they can alternate in conversation without missing a beat, one taking up where the other left off. I always get a bit dizzy talking to the Brotherhood.

The first thing one notices about the Brotherhood (after that hair) is that they seem—how should I say it?—unworldly. They appear to have just tunneled in from the 19th century. Your first reaction is to hold it against them, but it is not easy. They won't let you. Mr. Mathis was Phi Beta Kappa in philosophy before he became an artist. He has read everything. If you puncture his reticence, his natural quietude—with an equivocal remark about Warhol, say—you then begin to get an opinion for every subject and, what's better, a story for every opinion. One minute it is Praxiteles and his model Phryne in ancient Greece; the next it is Whistler suing the art critic Ruskin in Victorian England; the next it is how Rodin would have answered Pollock, or what Picasso should have told Gertrude Stein, or how Cellini would have dealt with the insolence of Clement Greenberg. In the world of Mr. Mathis, Nietzsche is always scolding Sartre, or Freud is psychoanalyzing Lacan, or Michelangelo is punching Arthur Danto (*The Nation's* current art critic] in the nose. Its great fun really, as long as he's not attacking *your* balloonman (Warhol fared rather poorly in our argument, I must say).

But it's also curious, in a way, all this talk. The work needs no justification. A great painting or sculpture requires no theoretical underpinning. But, as Mr. Mathis explains, he and Mr. Nielsen formed the Brotherhood expressly to "call the critics out." The artwork itself is not a response to anything; it is,

as Mr. Nielsen says, "A drink for the Muse." But what they say and write about art is a response. The Brotherhood is of the opinion that artists have lost control of the definition of art, and that critics and curators and academics have redefined it to suit their own purposes. Before the 20th century, art was defined by artists. During the 20th century, art has been defined by non-artists. This is the central problem.

And so, in order to out-write the writers and out-talk the talkers, it is now necessary to "know the enemy." Mr. Mathis told me,

"What the 90's have shown me, after the [art] market crash in the late 80's, is that Modernism is so entrenched, in the big museums and universities, at the institutional level, that it is not going to fade away. A lot of realists think that all they have to do is work and wait. That's what the realists thought in the 40's. In the 60's. But Modernism butters a lot of peoples' bread. It will have to be defeated, from the top down. A lot of people, people with a lot of power in the art markets, cannot approach art emotionally. They must view it intellectually. Political science has co-opted art. Analysis has digested synthesis. What is needed is a return to patronage—a coalition between real artists and the huge pool of quite intelligent and insightful people who find no art in '*art moderne*.' We must create a direct link between the artist and the public to bypass criticism. Art theory has become a fashion. But it is never fashionable to be wrong. The tide will turn when it is clear that our pool is deeper."

One of the "deepest pools" in the studio is a work by Mr. Mathis that he calls *The Triptych Altarpiece of Harriet Westbrook Shelley*.



Harriet Westbrook was the first wife of the great Romantic poet Percy Shelley, whom he left for Mary Godwin (she later wrote *Frankenstein*, remember). Harriet drowned herself in the river that flows through Hyde Park in London. The triptych consists of a central oil painting, eight feet high, flanked by two panels of poetry in script. The poem is (we are to believe) by Harriet, and in it she addresses the ghost of Percy. Percy drowned, too, in a boating accident, six years after Harriet. In the poem, the two drownings are connected; are no coincidence. The painting is of Harriet, rising from the water at midnight. There is also a sculpture of Harriet—a reclining bust—on the triptych's platform, among the candles. The gigantic mahogany frame, fifteen feet high in all, sports fishes and a seahorse above a rolling wave pattern at the top.

We have all been taught in our art history classes that the great subjects have been exhausted, that there is "nothing new under the sun." That epic or transcendent imagery is not relevant to our situation. The Brotherhood apparently missed that day.

Many of Mr. Mathis' other works are also nudes, although none of the others are as thematically ambitious. Still, a sadness or a melancholia permeates all his work. A little girl holding a ball. [A young woman](#) looking out a window into white light. A profile, half in shadow. Simple subjects, painted directly, unstylized, and yet somehow heartbreaking.

[Mr. Nielsen's works](#) are also highly emotional. Most of the sculpture in the house is Mr. Nielsen's. Concentrating on the nude male figure, he is obviously a student of Michelangelo. There is no break from nature, nothing of the existentialist, in these poses. The psychological calm of the Renaissance joins the physical tension of Rodin or Carpeaux, and yet these figures somehow avoid any direct derivation. One, a plaster "original" of a standing nude, depicts a long, straining body, arms and legs *contraposto*, topped by a serenely beautiful head—a head almost unaware of its torso's arch, its soul's ache.



Nearby is a halfsize bust of a young woman looking down, half smiling to herself, half brooding. I was reminded of one of Bernini's "speaking likenesses."



It is less refined than Bernini; but, perhaps because of the raw clay, it seemed even more alive. Another small figure, called by Mr. Nielsen *Thanatos* (the god of death), almost made me yearn for the grave. Death should not be so attractive. But one gets Mr. Nielsen's point. There is something uncanny, almost sinister, about such perfect beauty. It is hard to feel safe, at ease, in its presence—death or beauty—especially when it won't look at you.



"Why the 'Pre-Picassan Brotherhood'?" I asked the "brothers."

"Well, we wanted something memorable. And descriptive," answered Mr. Nielsen. "We both love Picasso's early work. *The Old Guitarist*. The Harlequins. But around 1905 he started listening to the critics—Roger Fry, Leo Stein—and it all went south. Picasso even admitted it. Then came Kandinsky and Duchamp and the rest: all the talk, the posing, the theorizing. Art as criticism. Art as politics. We wanted to get back to art as art. Art as creating something incredibly powerful or beautiful. We talk a lot—but, I mean with us, the work is primary. We don't talk about what our art means. We talk about why their theories are wrong."

"But aren't you concerned about the 'sexist' label?" I said. "All these female nudes, with no 'spin,' no clever, progressive message. And the 'brotherhood?' What's with that? You guys don't let girls in the club?"

Mr. Mathis fielded this one. "The Brotherhood is just us. Two guys. Is it now incorrect to call two guys a 'brotherhood'? As for the nudes, it is interesting that you only ask about the female nudes. The male nudes that we both do might equally be called 'objectified,' or whatever you mean. The point is that none of the figures, or the models, are treated as 'objects.' They are treated as subjects. Subjects for a work of art. They aren't just material bodies. They are invested with *more* importance than in daily life. Not less. They aren't 'used.' They are universalized. Just the opposite."

This answer, as unexpected as it was honest, somehow rang true to me. It sounded like something Rodin might have said about art. Or Degas. Straightforward, stripped of jargon, but with a blistering and beautiful acuity. It made me think:

As I drove home from the studio I looked out into the "real" world. I saw the hurried people zipping

past—SUV's and cellphones—even in this un-metropolitan town. And I remembered my time in New York City. I hope the Brotherhood has some armor that is not only well-polished but seamless. And they may, I don't know. They will need it in the first years of the 21st century. Idealism doesn't travel that well anymore. It is one thing to remain pure in the relative isolation of the west, before the pressures of money and fame have really taken hold. It is another to translate that to the reality of the major art markets. I am not sure it can be done. But I hope it can. I for one am weary of the din of small explosions that is the trade of Deconstruction and Postmodernism. It is pointless to go on strafing barren ground, bombing the surface of the Moon. A true progressive must begin to rebuild at some point.

The Best Art Writings of Miles Mathis

- 2024, [*The Poem that Should have Changed History.*](#)
- 2024, [*Corot and Reynolds at Fake or Fortune.*](#) Strange goings-on.
- 2024, [*King Charles' Portrait.*](#) And other things.
- 2023, [*Andy Warhol:*](#) the second biggest fraud in the history of art.
- 2023, [*Marcel Duchamp:*](#) the biggest fraud in the history of art.
- 2023, [*Why and How Bob Ross was Wrong.*](#) Including a health warning.
- 2023, [*Oscar Wilde's Genealogy is Garbage.*](#) As is his oeuvre. Plus a surprise ending.
- 2022, [*Brad Pitt, Artiste Manque.*](#) Also Nick Cave and Thomas Houseago.
- 2022, [*Already One Less Vermeer.*](#) See addendum, where I address new spin from the National Gallery.
- 2022, [*Which Witch is Which?*](#) More Botticellis to study.
- 2022, [*Another Fake Painting of Christ Pretend-Sells for \\$45 Million.*](#) I out three fake Botticellis.
- 2022, [*Made You Look.*](#) I pull apart this art documentary from 2020.
- 2021, [*An Art Lesson.*](#) Also a review, a critique, a memoir, and everything else.
- 2021, [*The Isabella Stewart Gardner Theft was an Inside Job.*](#) And the paintings stolen were all fakes.
- 2021, [*The Girl with a Pearl Earring is Fake.*](#) And so are most other Vermeers. Also an unexpected link to Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*.
- 2021, [*Burning Man and Modern Art.*](#) Confirmation that Burning Man is a military project.
- 2019, [*Dark MOFO.*](#) We go to Tasmania and look the small-case devil in the eye.
- 2019 [*A Salvator Mundi Update.*](#) I despin some of the most recent propaganda, including the link to Trump-Russia.
- 2018 [*Modernism is Fascism.*](#) I return to my old style of art counter-criticism, berserking the new critics.
- 2018 [*Jerry Saltz Hits New Lows.*](#) Do you really want to ask this guy “How to be an Artist”?
- 2017 [*Yes, the Leonardo Painting is a Fake.*](#) But there is so much more to the story.
- 2017 [*Mr. Turner.*](#) I analyze the 2014 film on the artist Turner, discovering far more than I ever thought to.
- 2016 [*Mabel Dodge Luhan was a Spook.*](#) Plus extended analysis of Georgia O'Keeffe and others.
- 2015 [*The “Artists” Duncan and Blake faked their Deaths.*](#) I fully unravel this old mystery from 2007.

2014, [*More on Propaganda in Art*](#), including another look at Bo Bartlett.

2014 [*Money Laundering in the Art Market*](#). I file a suspicious transaction report on the entire 20th century.

2014, [*Tim's Vermeer: More CIA Propaganda*](#). I expose this recent art documentary for what it is.

2013 [*A Review of The Painted Word*](#). 38 years late, but worth waiting for.

2013 [*The Stolen Century*](#). I reveal a century of deception.

2013, [*From Theosophy to the Beat Generation*](#), or, how even the Occult was Disguised. Including proof that MOMA is the CIA's Museum.

2013, [*The CIA and Art*](#). We look at Shepard Fairey's career, especially his OBEY line of propaganda.

2012 [*The Destruction of the Artist*](#). The Chuck Connelly story.

2012 [*On Meyer Schapiro*](#). Another counter-critique of 20th century propaganda.

2012 [*A Nation of Scabs*](#). Why the Realist market collapsed.

2011, [*Why I don't exhibit in Taos*](#). A critique of the galleries and of the Taos Fall Arts Festival.

2011, [*Modern Art as a Market Derivative or Credit/Default Swap*](#). I show that Modern Art is a derivative with no underlying asset.

2011 [*The Chapman Bros., Goya, and the Critics*](#), where I say what no one else is saying.

2011 [*The Mona Lisa Curse*](#). We look at Robert Hughes' film.

2011, [*Adam Gopnik and Jacob Collins*](#), a review of Gopnik's "review" in the *New Yorker*.

2011, [*Clive Bell and Formalism*](#). A counter-critique of his book *Art*, from 1913. This counter-critique might be called Whistler versus the Post-Impressionists.

2011, [*The Rise of Corporate Art*](#). The continuing evisceration of realism by realists.

2010 [*Prince Gimmick*](#), a counter-critique of Chuck Close.

2010 [*Agnes Martin*](#), and the psychological causes of Modernism.

2010 [*A Review of Tim Eitel and Pace Wildenstein Gallery*](#), including a counter-critique of Arne Glimcher.

2010 [*Balls in a Basket*](#). A review of a New York Times Review of a big show at the New Museum, including a counter-critique of Jeffrey Deitch.

2009, [*A Review of Bo Bartlett at Forum Gallery*](#), including passing commentary on other artists at Forum and John Pence Gallery.

2009 [*Dennis Hopper, Double-Fake Artist*](#). A review of Dennis Hopper, the Harwood Museum, Taos, and Hopper's buddies, including Larry Bell.

2009 [*On Balls and James Joyce*](#), a critique of *Ulysses*, the Modern Library list of novels, and modern fiction in general.

2009, [*The Venice Biennale 2009*](#). A counter-critique of *Art in America* and "Art" in Venice.

2009, [*Futurism and Stuckism*](#). I have petitioned Parliament to investigate the BBC, for propaganda in the arts section.

2009 [*The Turner Prize*](#). Excoriation of Britain's biggest prize, including commentary on Madonna, Dennis Hopper, and Nicolas Serota.

2009 [*A Return to the Hockney-Falco "Thesis."*](#) A thorough bludgeoning of Hockney, Falco and David Stork.

2009 [*The Holeness of Jasper Johns*](#). A counter-critique of Johns and his minions.

2009 [*Philip Pearlstein and the Plastic Nude*](#). Letting the air out of his long, fake promotion.

2009, [*Contra Dave Hickey*](#), against the art critic.

2008 [*Currin Again*](#). A third stab at the artist John Currin.

2007, [*Walter Pater against the 20th century*](#). "The School of Giorgione" destroys an entire century of art and art criticism.

2007, [*Nietzsche contra Modern Art*](#). *The Case of Wagner* as a text for critiquing Modernity.

2007 [*Chance Abutmenting*](#). A counter-critique of the current art critic at the New Yorker, Peter Schjeldahl.

2007 [*Contra Jerry Saltz*](#). A counter-critique of the current art critic at the New York Magazine, Jerry Saltz.

2006 [*The National Portrait Competition*](#). A dismantling of the cooption of realism by another cabal of New York phonies, including Carolyn Carr, Trevor Fairbrother, Brandon Fortune, Thelma Golden, Marc Pachter, and Katy Siegel.

2006 [*Claudio Bravo at Marlborough Gallery*](#). An amusing review of Bravo.

2006 [*A Review of Paul Oxborough*](#). An expanded review, where I mention many things, including some praise of Paul.

2005 [*New Realism*](#). An overview of contemporary realism, by a current player.

2005 [*A Review of John Carey*](#). art critic for the Sunday Times, London.

- 2005 [*The Many Failures of Modernism*](#). A historical overview of Modernism, by an artist.
- 2004 [*Why a Painter Writes*](#).
- 2004 [*The Cardboard Dragon*](#). A counter-critique of 20th century art, by going to a Sotheby's auction.
- 2004 [*MOMA and Dada*](#), a review of MOMA, the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1999 [*The Future of Art*](#). This was published in Art Collector/Art Connoisseur magazine, before I became too controversial for the contemporary art press. Part 1 of 3.
- 1999 [*Art Now*](#). This was published in Art Collector/Art Connoisseur magazine, part 3 of 3. It shows you how quickly I moved from an intellectual style to a direct and emotional style. Some will remember the calm of part 1 fondly, but I have always been partial to the sturm und drang of this part 3.
- 1997 [*The Art of the Lastman*](#), a review of 20th century art, using Nietzsche as my guide.
- 1996 [*Dante contra Danto*](#), a counter-critique of the Nation's art critic, Arthur Danto, where I go down to Hades to hear it from Van Gogh's own lips.
- 1995 *A Letter from the Artist*. One of my earliest extended treatises on art, where I hit many topics. Whistler is my guide here.

TOP 50 TV SHOWS

by Miles Mathis



Yes, I am on a list kick this month. I find I fail to be amused or informed by modern media lists, so I must amuse myself with my own lists. Just as I fail to be aesthetically pleased by the modern art offered me, so I create my own; just as I fail to be entertained by modern commentary and criticism, so I create my own; just as I fail to be convinced by modern science and theory, so I create my own; just as I fail to be enchanted by modern poetry, so I write my own; I suppose I will have to begin to build my own cars, pave my own highways, elect myself as my own representative, vote in a new government that I have invented, and found a new country on a new continent that only I can sail to, on a sensible planet hidden in the shadow of this one.

Which is all a highly eccentric way of saying that a couple of years ago *TV Guide* came out with a list of the 50 greatest TV shows of all time, and like many of you I was not too happy with that list. For one thing, you can just tell it was made by a committee. It shows, you know, statistical balance, but no sign of human interference of any kind—sort of like a *Charmed* script. I mean I like Jerry, too. But I don't think number one, my friend. Do you know why *Seinfeld* cannot be number one? I will tell you. Not a memorable theme song. A show without a good theme song will not have the staying power. The jokes are still fresh now, so it looks pretty good. But leave it in syndication for twenty years, it will age like Joan Rivers without botox.

The great shows all have great songs—songs that give you that warm fuzzy, that make you think of where you were when. TVLand calls it "rewatchability." All the rewatchable shows start you off with that sweet song, like a bite of soft chocolate or a cup of strong sugar-coffee. Addictive melody. Go down my list, they all have it. I hear that whistling, and there I am, five years old, watching Andy Griffith throw that rock and smile at Ope, and I am Ope, too, with an Aunt Bee at home waiting for us with hot cookies. I hear *The Brady Bunch* song, and I am nine years old again, with a crush on Jan. I hear Mary Tyler Moore's song and I am twelve, back at home with my family, warm and safe, in a sort of pre-knowledge cocoon, with my mom who looked just like Mary (or vice versa, sorry Mom). Later that same Saturday night, we all hear Carol Burnett sing to us that she is so glad we had this time together, and she pulls her ear at us, making us feel happy. I hear the *Cheers* song and I am with my ex-wife, us blissful newlyweds, as we watch Sam and Diane fall in love. I hear the *Friends* song, and I know that no matter how alienating the world gets—no matter how many crappy jobs or bad dates—those six cute silly people will be there for me.

But with *Seinfeld*, I will tune in in the year 2020, and all I will hear is that little *bowb-bowb-bowp*. What is that, a Jew's harp? There is no possible nostalgia in a *bowb*. I am being very very generous, I tell you true, putting Jerry at number 13.

What I think distinguishes my list is that not one doctor or lawyer show made the list. No *ER*. No *LA Law*. No *Marcus Welby*. No *Perry Mason*. Yes, I really would rather watch *Mister Rodgers* than watch *ER*. That is just how I am. In fact, I have sat through many fine episodes of *Mister Rodgers*. I have never been able to tolerate a whole *ER* or *Grey's Anatomy*. It is too much like *General Hospital*, with marginally better writing and acting. It is still fake drama. Drama that fails to be dramatic. I can suspend disbelief in order to laugh at canned situations, if they are funny. I can even suspend disbelief in order to follow the trolley to go see King Friday and Owl. But I cannot suspend it far enough to believe that doctors and lawyers are fascinating people. I can believe that Jeannie lives in that little bottle or that Samantha can fix things by wiggling her pretty nose, but I cannot believe that people are having sex in broom closets, or daily saving the lives of morally conflicted models. On the sitcoms, the situations are equally absurd, but no one takes them seriously. I find "serious" shows to be like sitcoms without the jokes and the laugh tracks—that is, just situations. I already have situations at home, and they are about equally boring. In fact, I have to suspend disbelief just to believe how boring they are.

That's why you almost never sees dramas in syndication. They aren't rewatchable. Rewatchability has so much to do with nostalgia. Nostalgia is created by 1) a theme song, 2) lovable characters, 3) a universal situation. Sherwood Schwartz may have been a kitschmonger, but he knew what he was doing. Jokes make characters lovable, not cheating or breastbeating. A desert island or a family home is a universal situation. A hospital or a courtroom is like an alien planet (without Spock or Kirk)—a place no one would think of visiting in real life, except maybe in a fly-by. A place for a bit of one-time voyeurism (voyeurism of the most fantastic and unlikely kind) but not a place one would return to again and again, like a candy store.

What about the drama *Star Trek*, you ask? Ah, but *Star Trek* was not a drama. It was fantasy. Suspension of disbelief is easy when you are on the edge of the unknown.

In order to come up with my list, I asked myself one simple question. If I were captured behind enemy lines, and my captors informed me they planned to torture me by making me watch the same series over and over until I cracked, which one would I last the longest with? Only the first five or ten shows came easily. I could make it for several days, maybe even a week, with my eyes forced open, like in *A Clockwork Orange*, watching Jennifer Aniston's breasts and all my other *Friends* being clever and funny. I could probably last even longer if I hadn't already taped most of the shows and watched them nearly non-stop for the last two years. But the last twenty shows on the list were hard to come up with. Most were basically filler. I could not really come up with 50. I resorted to some that were merely popular, rather than ones I liked personally. Even so, I didn't include any I wouldn't ever watch.

TV Guide included *Sesame Street* on their list, which gave me ideas in two directions. One, that I could include kid's programs. Two, that I could include PBS. That is where *Nature* and *Nova* came in. Yes, my tastes are very diverse. Highbrow and lowbrow in the same bag. A show on particle physics followed by Gilligan. Such is life. The kid's programming link allowed me to pull in *Captain Kangaroo*. Why should I limit it to *Sesame Street*, after all? The Captain was on TV for many years, was groundbreaking, and what's more, I watched it. If you take this list as a list for my whole life, the Captain has to be there.

That got me to thinking, why stop there. If a kid's program, why not a game show. Was there a game show that I thought should make the top 50? More to the point, was there a gameshow that could keep me from madness longer, behind enemy lines, than say *The Beverly Hillbillies*? I could only come up with one, in all honesty. One that I still watch: *Match Game*.

The hardest choice was for number 1. *Friends* has more laughs per episode, *Cheers* is more nostalgic. *Friends* had eight good years, *Cheers* had five. *Cheers* had a bit more depth and a bit more genius in writing, *Friends* had more stars. *Cheers* had more edgy characters, *Friends* had more babes. Both took a lot of risks and weren't afraid to innovate, while at the same time being very traditional. Meaning that they were classic sitcoms in the classic mold: the creators invented lovable characters in warm and toasty situations and put a lot of jokes in their mouths. That some or all of the characters were pretty never hurt. *Friends* perfected this formula to a point that will probably never be surpassed. *Cheers* get extra points for reaching the pinnacle with slightly more realistic characters. Only two of the cast members are pretty (three after Woody arrived and four when Lilith let her hair down) instead of all of them. *Friends* sidestepped this landmine of potential snobbery by convincingly making all of their pretty people partial losers. Every one of them had a Cliff Claven side, and this saved the show from the PC incorrectness it is so often (wrongly) accused of. But in the end, I chose *Cheers*, because at its very best it was as good as TV has ever gotten. The episode from season 5 called "Everyone Imitates Art" is, in my opinion, the most perfect 24 minutes ever filmed for the little screen. Several other episodes of *Cheers* approach it, but nothing else does. The writers for *Friends* were great at packing

jokes in, but they never could come up with stories this clever.

So here is my list of the greatest TV shows (US television only):

1. Cheers
2. Friends
3. Bewitched
4. Star Trek (the original)
5. Mary Tyler Moore
6. The Bob Newhart Show
7. Taxi
8. M*A*S*H
9. The Dick van Dyke Show
10. The Andy Griffith Show
11. All in the Family
12. Seinfeld
13. The Carol Burnett Show
14. The Simpsons
15. Frasier
16. Larry Sanders
17. Felicity
18. Red Skelton
19. The Ed Sullivan Show
20. Match Game
21. Happy Days
22. Partridge Family
23. Family Ties
24. The Waltons
25. The Bugs Bunny Show
26. The Muppet Show
27. I Dream of Jeannie
28. Perfect Strangers
29. Paper Chase
30. Simon & Simon
31. Nature
32. Bonanza
33. Late Show with David Letterman
34. Dick Cavett
35. The Flintstones
36. Gilligan's Island
37. Everybody Loves Raymond

38. Rocky and Bullwinkle
39. I Love Lucy
40. The Brady Bunch
41. Barney Miller
42. Laugh-in
43. Captain Kangaroo
44. Sesame Street
45. Wings
46. Two Guys and a Girl
47. Saturday Night Live
48. The Cosby Show
49. Batman
50. Mr. Rodgers Neighborhood

Some will be surprised to see *Bewitched* so high on the list, but I encourage doubters to rewatch the DVD's, especially from seasons 1, 3, and 4. I have recently, and I couldn't quit smiling. I sat there smiling like an idiot for hour after hour, my smile broken only by laughter. God, that was a more innocent time, and a funnier time, too. Elizabeth Montgomery, with her imperfect teeth and undoctored body and little pedal pushers and kneelength dresses, makes these modern Desperate Housewives and Sex and the City wannabes look like a gaggle of saloon whores and botox victims. It is like comparing Grace Kelly to Paris Hilton. If you wonder why no recent shows made my list, that is why. TV since the 90's has devolved into a plastic Futureworld of reconstituted people, and I can't watch current TV anymore, for fear that someone's breast is going to fall off or that someone's wiring is going to show through her skin.

The fact that struck me most about my list is the lasting shame of the cancellation of *The Paper Chase*. Over thirty years later, the shame is undiminished, and we can only hope that the executives at CBS who cancelled it are tied to some flaming wheel somewhere, on a spoke next to their comrades who cancelled Red Skelton. What we lost is what we would have lost if *Cheers* had been cancelled after season one (as it almost was). *The Paper Chase* had everything: cast, story, writers, theme song, director, the works. And no, it wasn't a lawyer show. It was a college show, like *Felicity* without the mood lighting.

After the list of top shows, I decided to append a list of top songs. If the songs are so important to rewatchability, then they need a list of their own. In judging theme songs I gave credit for traditional tune quality, memorability, creation of the proper mood, and also gave some weight to how much the tune helped the success of the show. These categories brought in many tunes from shows I almost never watched, like Love Boat and Petticoat Junction. I tried to ignore that part of the equation in judging tunes, since the actual quality of the show should not affect the quality of the tune. Love Boat nearly made the top 20 simply due to the fact that it was so perfect for the show. On the other hand, the theme from Lou Grant made it in because it is a great piece of workmanship in the field of tune-writing

(although most people probably don't remember it). The themes from The Waltons and The Bob Newhart Show are better pieces of music than the others, strictly speaking, but the words added a lot to Cheers and MTM, making these themes the finest of their kind. What a theme songwriter wants to do ultimately is create a 30-60 second bit of pure nostalgia, and that is what these are. This is one arena you get extra points for sentimentality and straight kitsch appeal. I had to downgrade themes like The Magnificent Seven and the Doris Day Show due to the fact that they were stolen from slightly higher fields. They weren't written for TV and didn't premier there. They therefore had an unfair advantage, an advantage I tried to factor out.

1. Cheers
2. Mary Tyler Moore
3. The Waltons
4. The Bob Newhart Show
5. The Paper Chase
6. The Partridge Family
7. Friends
8. Felicity (first year)
9. M*A*S*H
10. Star Trek
11. The Magnificent Seven
12. Lou Grant
13. Taxi
14. The Greatest American Hero
15. Mission Impossible
- tie Six Million Dollar Man
16. The Monkees
17. The Odd Couple
18. Bewitched
19. Green Acres
20. The Doris Day Show
21. Welcome Back, Kotter
22. The Love Boat
23. Moonlighting
24. Hawaii 5-0
25. Happy Days
26. The Brady Bunch
27. Davy Crockett
28. The Andy Griffith Show
29. Batman
30. Hill Street Blues
31. Gilligan's Island

32. The Beverly Hillbillies
33. The Twilight Zone
34. The Dick van Dyke Show
35. The Carol Burnett Show
36. I Dream of Jeanie
37. Rawhide
38. The Avengers
39. The Jeffersons
40. My Three Sons
41. The Dukes of Hazzard
42. The Flintstones
43. Sanford and Son
44. Sesame Street
45. Laverne and Shirley
46. WKRP
47. Fame
48. Petticoat Junction
49. Love American Style
50. Bonanza

If this paper was useful to you in any way, please consider donating a dollar (or more) to the SAVE THE ARTISTS FOUNDATION. This will allow me to continue writing these "unpublishable" things. Don't be confused by paying Melisa Smith--that is just one of my many *noms de plume*. If you are a Paypal user, there is no fee; so it might be worth your while to become one. Otherwise they will rob us 33 cents for each transaction.

The Absurdity of Modern Life and Art

by Miles Mathis



My first example here is courtesy John Bull. There is an ancient and great manor house in the English countryside—the name and location are irrelevant—that is currently undergoing a very expensive mapping and surveying process. All the latest gadgetry is being used—lasers and the like—and the BBC is proudly filming it, as an example of both good old-fashioned English thoroughness and the usefulness of technology. In the interview the steward, who has worked in the house for 40 years, is explaining the need for the survey. He says,

The knowledge of the house—the location of the pipes, the valves, the structural grid, all that one would need to keep up a great house like this—it has always been handed down by mouth. The former steward taught me and he was taught by his predecessor. But if I were to walk under a bus tomorrow, where would all that knowledge go? You would have to start over from scratch.

We are told that now the information will not only be written down, it will be fed into a computer, generating a 3-D model of the house and grounds. I imagine that most people will be impressed by this example of foresight. We don't want old and valuable information lost. But my only thought was, why not sit the old man down with a pen and a notebook and let him pass on his knowledge that way? The knowledge of the steward has kept the house running for centuries; why begin relying on a computer now? You can purchase a pen and notebook for a couple of pounds. These fools are spending hundreds of thousands of pounds for the same basic information.

Not only that, but consider again the steward's hypothetical question: "What if I walked under a bus tomorrow?" The poor steward has avoided the bus only to be run over by the computer. They won't need a new steward after the bus or computer is done with the old one. The computer can now run the house. A bit more wiring and the man is out of a job. The wiring in his head has been outsourced.

If the steward had walked under a bus and they had to start over from scratch, what would they do? They would hire a survey and mapping team to do a thorough job on the house, making a report and

creating a 3-D schematic. So, in order to save themselves the cost and ignominy of that, they have decided to order a survey and mapping team to do a thorough job on the house, making a report and creating a 3-D schematic, *before* the old man walks under a bus. Brilliant. An astonishingly efficient method—one possibly borrowed from NASA.

I mention NASA because NASA found that ink in a pen did not flow in a zero-gravity environment. This is example number two. In order that astronauts could still write in space, NASA spent several billion dollars developing and testing a zero-gravity pen. The pen is now proudly used on American manned space missions.

Some may find this a true example of Yankee ingenuity and persistence. But I have just invented a zero-gravity pen that costs 10 cents. I call it “the pencil.” NASA may want a smudgeless copy, but if so they can pay the extra 10 cents per page for lamination, or five cents for a Xerox. A copy of a penciled page looks and acts just like a penned page. Both are made with the same ink. Or I have heard that they may have computers aboard these spaceships now. How about having the astronauts use a keyboard, like everyone else? Or audiotape, or dictation? You can hire out a lot of shorthand for a billion dollars.

In art we see the same misuse of time, energy, and creative energy. This is example number three. Here in Bruges, Belgium, we have many examples of paintings that are more than 500 years old that are in near perfect condition. The paint is not cracked or discolored, the substrate has aged well or was easily replaceable, and so on. Italian paintings nearly as old are equally well preserved. I am thinking of Titian’s oil paintings, which are materially different from the Flemish paintings, but equally sturdy. So painting was blessed early on by at least two nearly perfect methods. Unfortunately almost no one uses them anymore, although neither one is especially difficult to comprehend, from a material standpoint. Most contemporary artists have preferred to solve a problem they never had, and they have preferred to solve it with a century of costly experimentation. Of all the various new art supplies now available to the artist, most are useless and many are harmful. In the first category are the myriad new colors. Except for ultramarine blue, none of these were truly necessary to the painter. The bright powerful pigments like the cadmiums and quinacridones and phthalos are not necessary unless you are painting plastic streetsigns or raincoats, and a Titian or Van Eyck would have avoided these on principle. Not because these artists could not comprehend fluorescent colors, but because these colors cannot be harmonized in a painting. In fact, Titian and Van Eyck and other old masters avoided many possible color combinations, combinations that were fully realizable at the time. Why? Because they were interested not in copying reality, no matter what it might be, or experimenting with the brightest possible values. No, they were interested in creating art, which was for them defined as harmony,

subtlety, and beauty, as well as the incorporation of some bit of reality or fantasy.

The category of harmful new supplies is much larger than the useless category, although there is much crossover. In this category we have manufactured mediums and varnishes and turpentine substitutes and sizes and grounds and supports made from questionable, shoddy, poorly tested, poorly composed, and/or toxic materials. We now have realists painting directly on plastic with nylon brushes, using plastic mediums, paints and varnishes. They have been convinced that their new supplies are safer and more permanent, but the reverse is true. In the 20th century, museums had much greater problems with artwork spontaneously crumbling, not less. New paintings are more likely to delaminate, crack, discolor, peel, rot, and slide, not less. And this is not limited to modern works. It includes new realism. Even at the top of the field, new realists are very likely to use inferior grounds and paint that is too oily. They use experimental varnishes with additives that are untested by time. And they use turpentine substitutes that claim to be safer but that are actually more dangerous. Artists have traded lead poisoning for a thousand new types of poisoning, many of them yet to be catalogued.

On top of all this stands the fact that most of this new material is not biodegradable. All these experiments leave permanent garbage. All the plastic and acrylic and nylon will still be here to crunch beneath the toes of our grandchildren and their grandchildren. You cannot say this of pre-20th century art. Those artists did not create permanent landfills of their mistakes.

This problem, like the first two in this paper, will not be solved by throwing money at it. It will be solved by taking money out of the equation. It will be solved by a common sense that has become very uncommon. It will be solved by putting a cork in all the salesmen and salesmanship of the modern world. It will be solved by reintroducing some very old-fashioned ideas like thrift, wisdom, virtue, simplicity, stewardship, and conscience. It will be solved by jettisoning novelty, ease, laziness, speed, short-cuts, public relations, advertising, and politics. In many ways, it will be solved by going back to the past, to a time when stewards—not computers—cared for houses; a time when people could write with pens that did not cost a billion dollars; a time when an artist could make his own materials from scratch, and enjoyed doing so. I have already returned to that past, and if I find myself mostly alone here, that is just one more benefit. It was much quieter then, I can tell you.

Alabastre



oil

20 x 14 in., 51 x 36 cm.

A Note on Triptych Altarpieces



In 2002 I had a short and hot flamewar with Rob Howard of the Cennini forum. During a mutual critique in which he singled out my *Triptych Altarpiece of Harriet Westbrook Shelley* for attack, he said this: "Somehow, the thought of people worshipping at that Mons Veneris strikes me as positively satanic.... Also, when painting a triptych, it's always wise to paint THREE pictures. What you have is a folding screen with a nude in the middle....Every other triptych I've seen had THREE painted panels. That's why they call it a TRI-ptych, you know, like TRI-plets, TRI-cycle and TRI-again with another lame excuse."

My response to the first quip was this: "If the mons veneris frightens you, perhaps you should limit yourself to painting men."

The second part of his attack requires a somewhat fuller response, since it is not a question of Howard's unnatural (though pandemic) cathexis but a question of fact. I had assumed at the time that my triptych was a sort of historical first, in that with the three panels of art I had mixed art forms in an

unprecedented way. No one will deny that poetry is an art form, and original poetry in calligraphy may certainly be called a visual art. We have three panels; three panels of visual art is a triptych.

It turns out that I was wrong in a sense, and that Howard was wrong in a rather larger, absolute, sense. I was wrong in that although my triptych may have been relatively rare, it was not completely unprecedented. With a bit of research (or, actually, luck in travel) I discovered that in medieval times triptychs with Biblical quotes on the two side panels were not uncommon. As an example, I offer an anonymous triptych now hanging in the Memling Museum in Bruges, Belgium, dated 1545 and called *A Triptych of the Adoration of the Magi*. A quote from the gospels written in calligraphy on the side panels flanks a single oil painting depicting the adoration. The literature tells us that this was just one of many such triptychs.



I still claim that my triptych may be unique in that the oil painting, the calligraphy, the text of the poetry, the sculpture, and the design of the frame and base were all by the same artist. If it is not unique, it is certainly rare. I would appreciate it if any historians who know of precedents would contact me, so that I may be correct in my claims. It is not of fundamental importance to the artistic effect, but it is nice to know the truth of the matter nonetheless.

I will close by addressing a final implication of Howard. If I have proven that my work is a triptych I have not yet proven that it is altarpiece, since the idea of an altar to Harriet Shelley may at first seem odd. She is not, after all, a god or saint. But the religious gods and saints are primarily symbols; they stand for virginity or chastity or some other abstract principle. A goddess or female saint stands for a part of womanhood. In the same way, I suggest in the triptych that Harriet Shelley powerfully symbolizes millions of women in history. Once you have read the poem and understood the significance of the work as a whole, you see that her similarity to religious martyrs is striking. Many female religious martyrs have been sexual martyrs. Mary Magdalene is the first example that comes to mind.

What I have done here is create a new iconography (in several meanings of the word) from a recent historical event. That is to say, this historical event (the two drownings) is recent enough to resonate with current emotions and crises and yet old enough to allow it to be mythologized.

I have to admit that my artistic inspiration was not so cerebral or premeditated. I chose the story primarily because it spoke to me personally—to recent events in my own life. I was not seeking it; it

was a fateful collision. I assumed, perhaps naively, that my attraction to the story might be a universal attraction, once its larger aspects were made clear.

I have so far resisted adding this sort of expository writing to the triptych, hoping that the work was not completely opaque. I had hoped that the work might even be embraced by feminists, who would see it as a woman-inspired work written and created from the point of view of the woman. But for the most part women (and especially American women) have been put off by the nudity and the fact that the artist is a man. They cannot judge the work on its merits. It is believed, perhaps, that man cannot have any deep insight into woman, or anything important to say on the subject intellectually or emotionally.

Or perhaps I am extrapolating too far from the relatively few comments I have collected. The work has not been seen in the flesh by a great number of people and it is admittedly quite difficult to digest online.

Addendum: I have been asked by a reader if I might not have let a piece of the tattered dress cover Harriet's pubic area, as a nod to decency. My answer: no, nor to prudery or marketing either. I admit that I had considered it. I am not unaware of the world around me. But the artistic effect I desired was ruined by any censorious drapery. I wanted Harriet to look ghostly and despoiled, and my most squeamish readers are only lucky I did not make her even less appealing. In my opinion she looks considerably better than a strict documentarian would allow. I did not want a bloated corpse to arise from those rushes, since my effect was to be tragic, not disgusting. But I did spend some effort, I remember, making the hair on her head look wet and dirty. The first time I painted it she looked a bit too much like Brooke Shields rising from the Blue Lagoon, and I had to stick her hair closely to her head to keep it from looking like a Hollywood re-enactment. In the poem it is clear that Harriet's cry is against all male idealisms, which would include prim saints and shaved or trimmed goddesses. Beyond that, a ghost could hardly arise from the Serpentine in 1825 with a Brazilian bikini wax. Once I had chosen to fly in the face of all small thinking, this was the only choice.

At the time, I had reasoned that if the modern world could accept Nerdrum's traffic victims and Saville's and Freud's rotting skintones they could accept my wild and untrimmed ghost of Harriet. The problem, of course, is that I didn't go far enough to attract the avant garde. I got caught in between theories. I had stepped well beyond the frigid good taste of contemporary realism but had not achieved the gratuitous shock value of a sheep sawn in half. Classical tragedy, like epic or elegiac poetry, is now a field with no practitioners and no market, as is all earnestness or grandeur in conception. I had updated and expanded a genre that could no longer be assimilated by the modern viewer, and neither my technique nor my novelty could overcome this fact. The realists, who might otherwise admire my technique, found my conception bizarre. The avant garde, who might otherwise admire my novelty, could not accept that I took history seriously, or took anything seriously. Nor could they possibly accept rhyming poetry, classical allusion, or an undeconstructed sexual desire.

In the end, I consider this the work's ultimate strength. It is unfashionable in every conceivable way. It purposely and simultaneously breaks all the rules of both realism and the avant garde. In doing so it re-establishes a pre-modern conception of expression and creativity, one that is much more useful to the

real artist. This conception is not based upon technique or theory, but upon emotion and inspiration. It is the supplication to one Muse or another, the praying at the altar of some goddess or saint of ones own making.

ALL APOLOGIES

by Miles Mathis

It is now all apologies, all the time. Round-the-clock coverage of people begging our forgiveness for their sins. Today it was Tiger Woods *and* Scotty Lago, yesterday it was John Mayer. Before that it was David Letterman or Mel Gibson or Michael Richards or Michael Phelps or Michael Vick or Cobe Bryant or Martha Stewart. Tomorrow it will be Charlie Sheen or the wife of Joe Stack. When these sinners take a break for a moment from their contriteness and groveling for our renewed good graces, it will only be to shuttle the microphone over to the shocked and saddened who are demanding apologies from Bernie Madoff or Hugo Chavez or the mistress of Kermit the Frog.

But you know what, I don't require apologies from anyone. Not because I don't believe their sincerity (though I don't). Not because I don't give a damn (though in this case I don't).

No, it is because I do not see myself as an amateur confessor.

It is because I do not believe in my own powers to grant absolution.

It is because I do not think I can change your opinion by feverishly demanding that you change your opinion. Coercion is the surest form of failure, and the first sign of it. Opinions can be changed by logic, reason, charm, humor, charisma, desire, and many other methods, but never by force or duress.

It is because I do not see my enemies as potential allies. You do not ask a rushing stream to apologize. You either wade it or you fall in.

It is because I recognize that politics by apology is pathological. Apologies are schoolyard tactics, impressive to some impressionable five-year-olds, maybe, but unworthy of adults. Politicians that make use of apologies simply reveal their disrespect for their audience. Voters that weren't stalled in adolescence would never believe that public policy was crafted with a series of sorry slurs, rebuttals, and retractions, but the contemporary voter is misdirected with so little effort. They see a playground fight and immediately peg the two bullies as class leaders. Meanwhile, the real class eggheads are building their ghoulish tomorrows behind the curtain.

I grieve for a culture that has nothing better to do than police itself and propel itself in such a childish, pathetic, and frankly ineffective manner. I cringe to imagine future historians reading our headlines, wondering what chemical inhibitors had made it into our water supply.

Let me break it down for you. Number one, apologies from public figures are less than meaningless. A demand for an apology from a public figure is just an invitation to a further lie. These people already lie for a living, so in asking for an apology you are just asking an actor to practice his craft on you. You

are asking a magician to put on his black hat and white gloves and pull a ball from behind your gullible ear. People who are impressed by the sincerity of public apologies are also impressed by the sincerity of actors and magicians: "Oooh, he sawed that lady in half with such sincerity!"

Two, an apology, public or not, is always just words. Words don't mean a damn thing in cases like this. This person, by his or her actions, has already done the deed. It cannot be undone by the apology. It cannot even be undone by future deeds. Words can be impressive, but only when they are joined to action. Leonardo talking about art is only impressive because his art is impressive. Madame Curie talking about her experiments is impressive only because her experiments are impressive. Tiger Woods talking about his (future) sexual discipline is not impressive because he has no sexual discipline. If he had any real desire for it, he would have had it already. He has plenty of discipline when he wants it, so we may assume he was doing what he chose to do.

Three, even if you believe in apologies (and I don't), an apology after a demand is worthless. Only an unasked-for apology could carry any weight, because in that case it might come from a nascent self-awareness. An apology after a demand for an apology is just a move in a game. It is strategic.

Four, apologies are the right size for small transgressions, but just look like propaganda with anything really important. Does anyone really care if Bush or Cheney or Bernie Madoff apologizes? Would you care if Hitler or Attila the Hun apologized, or Ted Bundy? I wouldn't. I don't want Bernie Madoff to apologize anymore than I want Wall Street to apologize, or the SEC. What I want is for the Glass-Steagall Act to be re-authorized, the SEC to be un-bought, the Federal Reserve to be demolished, and for all the bankers and Congresspeople and CFR bastards to be tossing eachother's salads in Rikers Island.

Was anyone impressed when Clinton apologized for slavery or when Germany apologized for the Holocaust? I wasn't. Clinton is not a slave owner and modern Germany did not kill all those people, but even if he were and they did, apologies are insignificant. If Clinton had apologized for slavery and then given Mississippi and Alabama to former slave families to do with as they would, I might have been impressed. If Clinton had apologized to Native Americans and then given them Montana and the Dakotas as a gift (while freeing Leonard Peltier), I might have been impressed. As it is, all we ever get is empty talk.

I am not interested in seeing our leaders give speeches or hold hands on the Capitol steps and sing God Bless America or appear on Jay Leno or shoot hoops or pose for public announcements or talk to soldiers in Iraq or give or receive tearful apologies for sleeping with men or muppets or marionettes. I am interested in seeing them spend taxdollars on something besides the military and the CIA and NSA and the TSA and passing some legislation other than Patriot Acts and bankster bailouts and pre-disaster mitigation and telecom immunity and suspicionless checkpoints.

Five, it is none of your business what anyone does in bed, including Tiger Woods. If you judge a golfer

on what he does in bed, you are a prude, a prig, and probably a hypocrite. If you aren't doing what he did, you either have a low libido or you can't get away with it. And if you choose to be monogamous, fine, it may be the best thing for you; but it doesn't automatically make you superior to Tiger Woods. Most of the high-profile people who preach and have preached monogamy, all the way back to St. Augustine, have not been monogamous. How many loud-mouthed preachers do we have to catch in bed with hookers and catamites and catamounts and kittens and hamsters before we lose interest in all such speeches?

You will say that if Woods wanted to be a swinging bachelor he shouldn't have married a wife who demanded he be faithful. He should have remained single or found a French wife. True enough: he set himself up for all this. Still, that's his business. We all make mistakes and get ourselves in jams. Those with bigger opportunities tend to get in bigger jams. But he doesn't have to justify himself to me. Why should he justify himself to you? I am neither the judge nor the policeman of his life, and have no desire to be. Why does anyone else have the desire to be? Tiger Woods' sexual choices affect me no more and no less than the sexual choices of Captain Crunch.

Many will say that Tiger Woods is a role model, but if either you or your kids are using famous people as role models, you deserve what you get. Tiger Woods must be thinking, "What kind of idiots take a professional golfer as a role model, sexual or otherwise?" And you know what, he is right. You might as well pattern your life after Spiderman or the Incredible Hulk.

Or how about John Mayer, and his tearful apology for using a forbidden word? I didn't think less of John for saying "nigger," since I happen to believe in free speech. I also believe that the dictionary is an open source, that words cannot be forbidden, and that "words will never hurt me." But I do think less of John for apologizing for using a forbidden word. Next he will be apologizing to Barbara Walters for dreaming of Jennifer Aniston's tits or apologizing to Glenn Beck for wondering if 911 was an inside job. I don't think less of people for making mistakes, but I do think less of people for caving into political correctness. I do think less of John for becoming the latest poster boy for pussy-whipping and cultural contrition. He will no doubt be on Letterman next week in his hairshirt and crown of thorns, confessing his latest thought-crime or speech-crime or his latest leaving-up of the toilet seat.

When did the superego take over culture? When did every last man, woman and child turn into the Church Lady? My dear modern media-muddler, what kind of small, pinched, righteous, vulgar person have you become that you are entertained by public apologies? You may need to ask yourself this: would you be more or less entertained by public beheadings? Would you prefer to see Woods peering out from beneath the guillotine? Would you prefer to see Mayer with his head in the stocks? Would you like a tomato or a head of cabbage?

I think the country may need to take this opportunity, now that Oprah is quitting (possibly to run for Queen of the World), to turn off the talk shows and other public gossip mills, and let the golfers play

golf, the musicians sing, the comedians pull faces, and the magicians fondle rabbits. Go back to your billion pornsite hits a day and just try to enjoy yourself.

If this paper was useful to you in any way, please consider donating a dollar (or more) to the SAVE THE ARTISTS FOUNDATION. This will allow me to continue writing these "unpublishable" things. Don't be confused by paying Melisa Smith--that is just one of my many *noms de plume*. If you are a Paypal user, there is no fee; so it might be worth your while to become one. Otherwise they will rob us 33 cents for each transaction.

THE 2008 ARC SALON

the second death of realism

by Miles Mathis



I give up. I want out. I want nothing more to do with realism. If this is art, I need to get into banking or something.

This is the last year I will bother to review the ARC Salon. It is getting too embarrassing. I had already refused to enter because I knew it was a waste of time: I had made too many enemies and could hope for no recognition in that direction. I might as well throw my slides into the street and hope the rain washed them into the right hands. But now I don't even want to be seen commenting on this tragedy. I need to burn the final bridge. I am confident I know how to do that.

A confluence of bad entries and atrocious judging leaves me almost nothing to say, and even less of praise. I had tried to be generous in past years, but it is time to dig a hole and bury all that.

[Last year I commented](#) on the lack of entries by Dan Gerhartz. Turns out that was because he was judging. This year I took the time to dig out the prospectus, which told me that the judges for the 2008 Salon are Nelson Shanks, Gabriel Weisberg, Paul McCormack, and Fred Ross. I can't load all the blame

on them, since I saw almost nothing at any level that I liked, either among the award winners or among those passed over. If I had been the judge I would have been tempted to call it a complete wash and throw the prize money into the sea.

That said, the judges still managed to put the absolute worst work at the top, as in past years. The best of show (above), by Hiroshi Furuyoshi, is frightening in its awfulness. It is 4096 square inches of ostentation, bad taste, and claustrophobic clutter. The central figure looks like a Disney CGI conception of Little Lord Fauntleroy, without the charm. The eyes, drawn wrong, make the boy look mad, which may or may not have been intentional—but it is hard to care. The facial expression is another manufactured mystery among a veritable smorgasbord of manufactured mysteries. I can't imagine anyone bored enough to study this painting for signs of sense. I have no doubt the artist has hidden lots of meaning in each cubbyhole, but I can't be bothered to look there for it.

This is clearly Nelson Shanks doing. He loves clutter like this: too much stuff painted with too much color, too much blending, and too little composition. And zero subtlety. Instead of painting as the search for beauty or expression, we get painting as exponential bragging.



The first place painting, *Anna* by Oleg Radvan, is also awful in its modern phoniness. It looks like a John Currin painting, or an Odd Nerdrum. The artist is trying very very *very* hard to be cool and avant, so that he can show at the Forum Gallery and maybe, with some luck, be invited to the Whitney. The judges must have huddled, agreeing in a bloody whisper that this choice might build a bridge to the modern market. This is the kind of painting that the critics in New York might even like. It has no real expression and no real beauty, but it has an *au courant* weirdness sitting on it heavily, like an elephant

worn as a hat. It doesn't make you feel anything—except possibly a mild disgust—but it gives critics and other idea-people lots of room to talk.

I give this choice to Weisberg, as the writer. Just as Hilton Kramer has embraced this sort of modern realism, possibly Weisberg has decided to embrace it for the same reason. When the critic nuzzles this sort of painting, we see the wallflower winking to the crowded floor, the nerd combing his oily hair to be noticed by the fancy girl. Giving speeches attacking the new world gets old after a while, and even the men in wingtips need attention. Nerdrum knew how to get it, Currin knew how to get it. Maybe Ross and Weisberg can get into the rave at last, by snuggling close to the cool guy when the doorman studies the stamps.



Still, odd it is that Fred Ross should forbid me to write about Munch, then give a top award to a painting like this. You will say, yes, that is odd, but it is also odd that I should praise Munch's *Puberty* and then damn this painting by Radvan. So I will stop a moment to tell you why. Munch's *Puberty* is weird, by classical standards, but the weirdness is not manufactured or fake. Munch *successfully* captured the awful scary otherworldliness of puberty, as felt by a young girl. Radvan captures nothing here. He has tried to capture “modern bleakness”, perhaps, but that is too broad a feeling to capture with a blank stare and an ugly stripe. Radvan has achieved nothing beyond positioning himself as a modern. The painting doesn't *do* anything; it conspicuously and purposely fails to do a lot of things. By sailing wide around beauty and expression, it screams “I am a modern!” In this way the painting is not so much a work of art as a statement. That is why the critics will like it, if they do like it. All art now is supposed to be a statement. Old-fashioned art is never a statement, and modern art, no matter its form, is always a statement.



Aron Wiesenfeld's *Girl with Bike*, from the 2005 Salon, was weird and bleak, but it was not modern in this sense: it wasn't a statement. Like Munch, it was a successful depiction of a very strong mood. It was modern only in that its subject was contemporary. But the artist's intention was classical or traditional: he used the scene to create the feeling directly. Radvan doesn't do this. Radvan uses realism to undercut realism, to undercut expression itself. Although their styles are similar in some ways, Radvan is like Currin but Wiesenfeld is not. Wiesenfeld borrows the modern style, but he has a talent for expression that cannot be snuffed out. To be accepted by the modern market, he will have to either excise it, or turn it completely to pathology.



We can see this is the road Radvan is on with his other entry in the Salon, *Test Pilot*. This painting is actually much much worse than *Anna*. *Test Pilot* is a very poor pastiche of Nerdrum, down to the leather caps and the smocks painted straight from Rembrandt. What makes it infinitely inferior to Nerdrum is that Radvan apparently snatched his model from NBC Nightly News. He has painted the same 60-something Republican lobbyist or anchorman three times, barefoot, *sans* pants, *avec* ropes and blocks of stone. Why? Do you really want to ask that question? Could there be a good answer? Maybe this is meant as a parody of Nerdrum, showing how ridiculous the entire fake-myth motif is. If so, it could have been made much funnier, with, I don't know, maybe Obama, Pelosi, and Geithner in leather caps, with erections, flexing their feet and singing to the moon, as Bush and Clinton squat on the edge of the forest in approbation, using the Glass-Steagall Act to wipe with.

But I think *Test Pilot* was meant seriously. I think Radvan is trying to follow Nerdrum, not ridicule him. This makes the painting so gloriously awful that it must pull all else down with it: all of Radvan's other work and all of the judging in the Salon. If Leonardo had entered two things in the Salon, *Mona Lisa* and *Test Pilot*, I could never look at *Mona Lisa* again. The fact that the judges found *Test Pilot* good enough to make the finals means that all four of them should be banned for life from judging.



We see this again with the top prizes in sculpture. The apocalypse is really just around the corner. I am convinced of it. It would have been better had realism stayed in the grave. Contemporary realists aren't taking the edge off God's wrath, they are doubling it. Why is *Lot's Tribe: Pieta*, by Mike McGrath, in the top spot, unless the judges are looking to God to spare them from the ice and fire? To begin with, the title doesn't make any sense: it can't be about Lot's tribe and a Pieta at the same time. A Pieta is a depiction of Mary grieving over Christ. Just look it up in the dictionary. Beyond that, the sculpture is a technical dodge. It is made of salt and the people are melting, so they don't have to look good or be completely sculpted. Convenient. If the man has holes for eyes and no lips, well, you would too if God

had hit you with a dessicating ray-gun. Convenient. No doubt the judges were impressed by the novelty of it. They are not impressed by the novelty of modernism, but a little novelty in service of the Bible and realism is Okey-Dokey! I must suppose that the sculpture is standing on a grating so that the public can watch it melt in the rain, or something like that. It appears that one of the thumbs already fell off, but that is just part of the spectacle. It is a temporary sculpture.

In second place we have a Deon Duncan sculpture, a little half-naked boy in a hat, Tom Sawyer at eight or something like that. Fairly well-sculpted, but boring. He is not beautiful or interesting or expressing anything, so why is he here, standing in for art? Duncan's other entry *Marin* should have clued in the judges, since it is similar but worse. It shows us the lack of expression in pose and face was no accident. Again, the wooden stance and the head like an empty gourd.



Phillipe Faraut, one of the few real technical masters, offers a dud in third place. Again, not beautiful, not expressing anything real, just a manufactured prayer to the judges, to spare a holy man from the final cut. Twain was wrong, patriotism is only the next-to-the-last refuge of a scoundrel: even better than the flag is the Bible.

Republicans seem to love to give awards to black people praying. Remember that the best of show in 2006 was a Dean Mitchell painting of a black woman with her hands formed like this. Better, I guess, than paintings of black people giving speeches or protesting racism or throwing bricks through bank windows. As Freud told us, religion is a great way to keep people—black or white—tame and subservient.



Kraig Varner should have won the sculpture category, and probably best of show, for *Africa*. I don't usually like gratuitous tooling, as in Richard MacDonald, but the rough marks seem to me to work here. I like both the expression and the pose. I also like the technique.



Cody Swanson did lots of things right with *Salome*. Her facial expression is really nice. He should lop the head and show it alone. But the body is all wrong. That is a man's torso with breasts, and Cody has studied Michelangelo too long. Michelangelo's only weakness was the nude female, and we don't need to copy that. Yes, women do look like that sometimes now, when they are sprinters drugging up for the Olympics, but I don't think they had steroids back in biblical times.



Robert Bodem's *Petrushka* is very well done, though it is misspelled and doesn't look like Petroushka. I would give it second place nonetheless, simply for technical virtuosity. Not crazy about Bodem's yellow/black patina, but I have seen worse. His sculpting is first-rate, there is no getting around that.

Only one other nice thing to say, and I will get it in here while my ire is idling somewhat. I like Yuri Diatlov's *A Girl*. It is illustrative and doesn't have a lot of depth, but it is well done. It is completely successful on its own terms.



Now back to the ire. Paul Oxborough is really beginning to get on my nerves. He got caught in 2006 with his head up Chuck Close's ass (see [my critique of the National Portrait Competition](#)), and he is still riding that obsequious pony here with another portrait of Close. He and Chuck should just move in together—then they can go to parties and bow to the promoters in tandem. Paul better keep his shoeshine kit in good order, since he gets lazier every year. His other entry is a horrible Sargent knock-off called *The Grand Canal*. I actually got out my Sargent books to see if I could find those exact brushstrokes. I know I have seen that water somewhere. But Sargent would never be caught with a sky like that! Is Paul being paid by Nike now to use paintsticks, or is that Crayola? The shirt is painted the same way: 70 square inches, one brush, three minutes of work. The hands are distressing: a sharpened forefinger; a middle finger short and fat, and a pinky long and thin. Then, look at the gold mess behind the girl: is that a boat ornament or has a golden seahorse just risen from the canal to nibble her vertebrae? I like some energy in the paint handling, but this is a mess.



Oxborough's third entry is a group portrait of five children. The drawing is good, but we have to wonder if Paul is in control here. It appears that he just drove in one Saturday and took a few snapshots: the drive-through portrait. He couldn't get the kids to change their clothes, couldn't get Mom to go shopping, couldn't find a paintable background, and couldn't bother to arrange a pose or a composition. So like Pearlstein, he just painted whatever happened. Maybe he can do a portrait of Pearlstein next.

The kids in socks look like they are wearing stone clogs. There is no color harmony, since the red-orange shirt can't go with the pink shirt can't go with the yellow striped pillows can't go with the tan cushion. The children all look bored or sullen, except for the little guy who is chewing his cheek from

the inside. These are not bad looking kids, especially the girl, and with a little effort you could make them presentable. Here they are no different than they would be from hour to hour. Why does anyone need a portrait of that? I'm sure Oxborough got a big fee for that many heads: he might have bothered to do a bit more work for it. He should give it a Whistler-esque title: *Sweatsocks and Bluejeans: a (non)Harmony in Red-orange and Pink and Yellow and Tan and Blue and Purple and Green and White and....*



Dan Gerhartz has fallen from grace in much the same way. He is painting now to feed his family, and god does it show. With *In Her Care*, Dan keeps a lovely sense of color balance, but has lost his famous brushwork. This just looks quick and lazy. And the yellow reflection in the water is simply ugly. That grubby paint quality looks more like Nicolai Blokhin than the Gerhartz we knew in the 90's. Everything is going from loose to mannered. Look at the edge of the hair, how he is using those ragged scumbles where they aren't necessary.



His second entry is *The Crescent Cradle*, which I badly want to like. I have been looking for a Gerhartz nude for almost 20 years, but I think he is too late. He has to tart this one up with those sickening yellow flowers. The last thing you want to do is drown out a blonde girl's lovely hair with bright lemon yellow in the foreground. The pattern on the floor is lazy, and the blue-green sheet is a blob. The hair is too spiky and the skin has too much color in it. She is too purple and yellow. The thumb is a lovely shape, but the hand and arm lack definition because they are lit wrong. They are lost in a half light, and we miss them in the glare of the fully lit flowers and the glint of the bowl. This is upside down. The lovely hand should be featured, with the bowl and flowers in supporting roles, or pitched out the window. Beyond that, the painting was simply done too quickly. It is 60 inches, and probably took a matter of hours. We are all proud of Dan for painting from life, but he needs to book about thrice the model time.

His third entry is *Midsummer's Night*, but it looks nothing like the title. The ghastly flowers are glowing from every corner, lit by either the midday sun or a 500 watt bulb. The pretty girls are at a vapid maximum, expressing large amounts of bourgeois nothing. Everything is painted as a blob: the hands are boneless, the dress formless, the couch draped and depthless. Against this, the toes are strangely square, as if they have been filed down or excessively clipped. Somehow a toenail reflects in the middle of the night. The bluegreen dress shines with an ugly butterscotch yellow, along with the shoulders and hair. Beyond that, the whole concept reeks of a set-up, since what eleven-year-old girl wears a strapless taffeta gown to sleep on the sofa in the middle of the summer? We are at the other extreme from Oxborough here. Apparently the modern child will either wear bluejeans and sweatsocks or taffeta: there is nothing in between.



Christopher Pugliese's entries are also strange. He is trying something new, but it ain't working. In both he has seated figures fighting against their frames, for reasons not clear to us. But he has completely lost control of his backgrounds and color harmonies. The figures are smooth but the backgrounds and drapes are rough and thick and scumbled. It must be a purposeful juxtaposition, since it couldn't be accidental, but there is no aesthetic justification known to me. Maybe he took a shine to Oleg Stavrowsky, and decided to bypass trying to set his figures in their environment in a realistic fashion. It is willful, but it is not logical or beautiful or powerful, in my opinion.

The figurative category is a total fucking loss. Where is Lipking? Where is Burdick? Where is Bartner? Where are Mary Minifie's cute little people? Why didn't Mike Malm make the cut? Did Wiesenfeld really only enter the one charcoal? The only thing I can stand is Derun Liu's *Xiou*, which is at least (mostly) honest and well painted. But why paint half a lightswitch? It pulls your eye off the girl for no reason, except to yell once again, "I am modern!"



Oh how we needed Lipking's *Last Light*, to show what I mean by subtlety. It was painted quickly from life, but it isn't lazy or rushed or faked. It doesn't have 10,000 books or flowers in the background; it isn't modern; isn't making any statements. It is the best thing he has ever done. It is beautiful. I am not sure it was best to cut the other nude in half, but we can forgive him that—it maintains a balance even so.

We don't even get a nice Glenn Harrington in the landscape category like we did last year. Nothing exceptional.



In still life we get one chuckle, from Jonathan Queen's *First View of Florence*. First place to him, and nertz to the rest.

In drawing, nothing but Aron Wiesenfeld's *Suspended*, which shows lots of character and iconoclasm, but which isn't as fetching as *The Delegate's Daughter* or even the *Fish Gatherer*.

This show, like all the other realist shows, is a sign of the times. Nearly all entries are from the sort of artists who would have been assistants in the past. They would have painted trees for Rubens or flowers for Van Dyck or drapery for David. They are talented, often hard working, and can paint anything. Problem is, they have no real eye for beauty, for composition, or for subject matter. They usually have no eye for color harmony, and are blind to mood and depth. This situation, caused by *egalite*, might be ironed out if the judges had an eye for beauty, but the realist judges are normally just more ambitious and more successful assistants. They have reached the top of the market one way or another, but in the modern world you don't reach the top of the market by having an eye for beauty. You reach the top the market by producing the required vulgarity for the vulgar clients. This is the reason the contemporary realist show looks like it does, and why it is self-perpetuating. The judges can only judge what they can see, and they cannot see real beauty or subtlety.

And ARC? I think ARC is finished. Five million hits a year? So what, I get a million on my site, and do only negative PR. ARC will not rent a gallery or have a real show, and the judging gets worse every year. I guess next year they will line up Pino, and the year after Thomas Kinkaid. After that the only way down is to hire David Hasselhof, Paris Hilton, and Charo to judge. I honestly think Charo could have judged better than Shanks: she could not have judged worse.

That is where we are headed, I kid you not. Here in Taos, Dennis Hopper is curating a show at the Harwood Museum. Why? Because he spends a lot of money on bad modern art. The show is running concurrently with the "Taos Summer of Love" commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Easy Rider*. Maybe the ARC Salon next year can run concurrently with the 150th anniversary of the Republican Party, or the 50th anniversary of *Gidget Goes Hawaiian*.

A Defense of Ashley Olsen

by Miles Mathis



The gossip news this week (11/1/07) was led by the report that Lance Armstrong is now dating Ashley Olsen. Armstrong is 36 and Olsen is 21. MSNBC called Armstrong a “loser” for dating a younger woman, and AOL accused him of “robbing the cradle.” In an AOL poll, 65% thought the match was “gross”.

Americans, supposedly the most sex-obsessed, sex-drenched people in the history of the world, are clearly not living up to these false labels. Even the Europeans, who are actually much sexier (although not as sexy as they imagine), *think* that Americans have more sex, are more sex-obsessed, and are more sex-saturated. Our media may be slightly more sex-saturated, but the majority of Americans are still prudish when it comes to sexual issues, as this flack over Armstrong and Olsen shows. No, much more than that, Americans are still *pathological* when it comes to sex, and it would be easy to make an argument that they are even more pathological about sex than the Puritans or the Victorians, since their actions are even more confused and illogical.

At least the Victorians and Puritans had clear religious reasons for being prudish or frigid or pathological. They were brought up with very strict injunctions, imposed early and consistently. Religion was powerful and pervasive, and a large majority took it very seriously.

Religion is not dead in the US, not even to the extent that it is in Europe. I am not here to claim that it is or should be. But I guarantee you that these news shows are not pursuing this topic for religious

reasons, and that the 65% are not saying “gross” because they are strict in their religions. Maybe 5% have learned their prudery and pathology from their religions. The rest are just Americans in America, taking their pathology straight from the media (the real religion).

The question becomes, why is the media selling sexual pathology if not for religious reasons? I will come to that next. But first I would like to point out that no religion ever invented or promulgated taught that a 21-year-old woman was a child. No religion ever invented or lofted down from any godhead ever taught that there was anything wrong with 20-something women dating or marrying 30-something men. It is clear that this Armstrong story would seem very odd to Europeans, who have no requirement that partners be the same age. But it is equally strange to people all over the world, outside the US, of both sexes, who would not understand the problem here. And, it would be equally strange to the Puritans and Victorians, who would have seen this age difference (36 to 21) to be about right. Even beyond the fact that this particular age difference was commonplace or average for the Puritans or Victorians, is the fact that even if it weren't commonplace--due to social factors at the time--there would have been no other reason to object to such a match. The girl is not only many years past puberty, she is of legal majority, by the strictest of standards. In fact, by the standards of the time in Victorian England or Puritan New England, she would be approaching fears of old-maid status. A lot of women who weren't seriously courted by 21 would never *expect* to be courted.

But there is more to it than this. Girls go through puberty much earlier now than they did then, so that a 21 year old like Ashley Olsen is statistically something like *9 years* past puberty. We cannot know Ashley's actual situation without asking her: it could have been as early as 10 or as late as 15. I think I remember reading that one of those twins, or both, has had trouble with anorexia, so puberty may have been delayed, but that is very far from being an argument against me. In any case she is many many years past puberty, and it is common knowledge that eating disorders like that are almost always caused by sexual problems. And, I might as well say, they are not caused by having too much sex, but by having too little. If you are shocked to hear this, you are one of the prudes I am talking about, and you need to get your head out of the sand. If you don't believe me, you might try reading a book or asking a professional psychologist.

So we have here a young woman who may be a decade past puberty, who was of legal consenting age at 17 or 18 (depending on the US state; 14 in Canada), who is of legal majority in all respects, and who has been implicitly crying out--in full public view--that she is sexually repressed. And yet now that she has apparently found a boyfriend, we have to try to take him from her. We cannot let her enjoy him. We have to imply that there is something wrong with both of them. We cannot outlaw her enjoyment, but we can try to diminish it with every means at our disposal, short of formal ostracism.

We would we do this? Why would the media be so extravagantly and transparently cruel?

You will say that we love to see our heroes and heroines take a dive, and that is surely part of it. But once that is admitted, one must ask, why do we love to see our heroes and heroines take a dive? What is going on here, and why does it so often have to do with sex?

Before I tell you, I feel I must drop a paragraph in here stating for the record that I am not defending Lance Armstrong. He is not a friend of mine, and is far from a hero. I actually would *like* to see him take a dive, but not for any of the standard reasons, and not for this reason. I think he used drugs to win his Tours, but I don't care. Everyone else was using drugs, back to Anquetil and before, and I don't think he or Hamilton should be singled out. Rather than punish those two guys, I say close down the whole sport as a nuisance, and all other professional sports while you are at it. No, the reason I want him to take a dive is that I have read that he is "a close personal friend of George Bush." Any friend of Bush is an enemy of mine. They can all go to the gallows together.

No, I don't care who Lance is dating. He can be dating Matthew McConaughey for all I care. The issue is not Lance Armstrong and his personal and private life. The issue is the right to date, the right to love, the right to marry, the right to have sex. The media can report on Lance's string of lovelies all day and all night and not bother me, but when they start ostracizing couples for a normal age difference, that is where I draw the line.

As I have already made clear, the importance of this issue is more on Olsen's side than it is on Armstrong's. She carries a bigger social burden than he does. When the media blasts them apart, she will suffer more than he will, since she is younger and is already on or near some sort of cliff. He will continue his little joyride, with women younger or older. But she will emerge scolded by her "sisters" and their cuckolded male minions. She will be forced to date some even younger idiot, some 21-year-old moron who is in the media for singing a bad song or rapping a bad rhyme or dunking a basketball or something. Her odds of happiness and satisfaction will then be near-zero, but who will care? At least her older sisters will have snatched back one over-30 bachelor for themselves (they will think).

Yes, this is the first of two major problems I am going touch on here: *bad blood with the sisters*. In general, 30- and 40-something women hate younger women. They aren't even subtle about it anymore. They used to have to insert the knife in private, in the back, but now they do it right in the belly, in full view of the cameras. Older women have become more powerful in society. They are extremely powerful in media right now, and that explains--more than anything but one thing--why stories like this lead the press so often.

To begin with, the bad blood is not only among the "sisterhood". It is also between mothers and daughters. Women have always been jealous of their daughters, but I have to believe that this phenomenon has only recently become epidemic, fatal, and ludicrously transparent. As an artist, I have worked with a lot of women of all ages, and it astonishes me how jealous women can be. I have seen mothers lividly jealous of their 11 or 12-year-old daughters. Recently I had a clash with a mother who was already neurotically jealous of her 4 year old. These mothers claim they don't want artists making too much of the beauty of their daughters, to control vanity or whatnot, but what 4 year old knows anything of vanity? I should think that a 4 year old is *supposed* to be rather self-absorbed. I don't see how one could even tell if a 4 old *was* vain. It is like trying to discover whether a 4 year old has ADD. Wouldn't we be shocked if a 4 year old *did* have a long attention span?

These mothers, under the claim of protection or over-protection, are simply jealous of the attention naturally given to youth and beauty. They will begin by shooing off artists and photographers, and will graduate to shooing off all boyfriends. The teen boyfriends will be shooed off as too “immature” and the older potential boyfriends will be shooed off as “perverts.” Then the daughter will be free to go to college unencumbered by love or affection, and there she can become frigid and anorexic like the rest of her protected pals.

This is how it works inside the American home, but outside it is hardly better. Older women have fenced in all the teen girls. Legally, teen girls can’t date anyone but teen boys. Older women don’t want to date teen boys, so they leave them to the teen girls. That the teen girls aren’t much interested in teen boys either does not concern older women. In fact, it works out perfectly. The lack of action on everyone’s part, in most instances, traumatizes the youth of both sexes, and the traumatized are easier to control in the next round.

It is the young women, though, from 18 to 30, who are now the target of front-line propaganda. They are the “next round” after high-school. As they did with teen girls, the older women want to fence this bracket in, too. They want to keep these young women away from the most eligible bachelors, who tend to be 30 to 50. They can’t always tell the bachelors what to do, even now (though they try, valiantly). So they target the young women. These young women are schooled to date only 20-something men. That is what all this age-specific dating is about, you know. Keep everyone corralled in their minor arenas, and the major arena falls to the powerful older women. Outlaw or forbid the most eligible men from dating teens or 20-somethings, and they then have to date older women or become monks.

Beyond this, we hear an incredible amount of propaganda trying to convince us that older women are sexier, better lovers, and so on. Like anything else, if it were true, it wouldn’t need to be propagandized. You don’t need to convince people of things that are true. You need to convince people of things that are false. Some older women are very sexy, very beautiful, very interesting, and all that. I am not denying it. But in general, or as a statistic, everybody knows that women are at their most physically attractive in their teens and 20’s. This has always been true and it is still true. To deny it takes fantastic levels of dishonesty. All you have to do is look at all the art in history, all the love poetry, all the fantasy, all the Hollywood movies, all the porn, to see that the largest category by far concerns the astonishing power and beauty of youth. You may or may not like this, but it is a fact of nature, ultimately beyond any like of yours. You may push nature to conform to your likes or dislikes, but every push will create a pathology.

To deny this is absurd, and yet it is denied, across the board. Many men even deny it (especially if women are listening). I find this truly pathetic. That many men should be forced by circumstance, or the superior power of women, to accept social situations that do not suit them is understandable, but they don’t have to be such worms about it. Back when women were forced into matches they felt lukewarm or cold about, they at least had the chutzpah to complain about it. They fought back, with every tool, large or small, at their disposal. But men have gone down with hardly a whimper. I haven’t heard a peep since Norman Mailer hit the canvas, 20 years ago.

Some high-profile men like Armstrong will be free to ignore the rules made by older women. These men are used as examples to continue the assault. They are the scarecrows for propaganda. "Look at this loser," say the older women, "too unsure of himself to deal with a mature woman." You hear this kind of thing everywhere now. I remember in the movie *Guinevere*, written and directed by a woman, we got this line from the 21-year-old girl's mother. The 40-something mother, still beautiful, confronts the 40-something photographer dating her daughter, and she lays this line on him. The script has him turn into a whimpering poodle, saying nothing to the mother, only admitting to the daughter later that the mother was very perceptive. In other words, admitting she was right. But she wasn't right at all. She was fooling herself. The script was a grand falsification of nature, playing to the insecurity of older women. For although the mother was still beautiful (played by Jean Smart) she was nowhere near as beautiful as the daughter (played by Sarah Polley, 8 years ago). Beyond looks, the daughter was charming and real and unspoiled. The mother was overdressed, over made-up, smoking, and aggressive even when she wasn't confronting the photographer. The movie made this clear in other scenes. She was super-high maintenance, talked too much, and was basically no fun to be around, at all times. A bastardized form of feminism had made her think she was basically superior to all men, from the get go, and even her husband was made to feel this. I wanted the photographer to tell her, "Look, Toots, you are a royal bitch on wheels, but even if you weren't you couldn't compete with your daughter, who has the skin and hair of a 20-year-old. That's just the way it is, and all your moaning will never change it. You were that age once, and got your share of attention, I am sure. Why don't you back off and allow me my short time in the sun? If 40-something photographers appeal to young women, then they do, and that is all there is to it. I was ignored for decades, as a geek in high-school and as a poor man in my twenties. If I've got a little something going on now, of whatever sort, then just let me have it. I mean no harm to your daughter, will treat her better than the young guys, and may even have something to teach her. So take a fucking hike!" In fact, the movie corroborates all this, although it was written and directed by a woman. The photographer saves the girl from a boring life, from her own boring family, and initiates her into an artistic career. He was the best thing that ever happened to her, and this is clear at the end. This lady director is kind enough to admit this, even as she tramples on the poor photographer with her script. She has him booze and smoke himself into an early grave, losing his teeth at 45 and die at 48, as if he is paying the price for being a "bad man". The girl arrives at wealth and prosperity, *via photography*, while the man is branded "loser". Typical Hollywood bullshit, in other words, and typical fake feminism--feminism which has nothing to do with equality and everything to do with anti-natural propaganda.

OK, I think I have made my point there without much beating around the bush (so to speak). What is the other problem, the one that outranks even this one? Well, this problem is strictly Freudian. In fact, it comes straight out of his book *Civilization and its Discontents*. There, Freud tells us that one of the main jobs of civilization is subverting and redirecting the sex-drive. In order to maximize the work you can get out of people, you must minimize the sex they have, or the sexual fulfillment they have. Every high-school football coach knows this. So big business and the government are quite satisfied to let older women spoil everyone's fun, for whatever reason. The powers-that-be will welcome any and all pathologies, neuroses, and inversions, as long as they are forms of "don't do it" or "just say no." The

amount of work we are getting from young women is mind-boggling, and if all these women were sexually satisfied, we would be getting much less work from them. They would be lying in bed smiling, or sleeping ten hours a night, or otherwise wasting precious work-time.

Some of those on the right pretend that they don't want women working (outside the house), but most people on the right are driven by money first, and women working is what has made the American GNP what it is. Since the 1950's we have doubled the number of subverted sexualities we have in business, and for the economists there is no going back. To drive the growth economy, we cannot think of any sort of sexual health or satisfaction. On the contrary, we must continue to ensure sexual dissatisfaction and pathology.

This is not to say that everyone must be celibate. The sexually active can be dissatisfied, as long as the sex they are allowed to have is pathological itself. As everyone knows, it is quite easy to have sex and still be unsatisfied. All sex does not have to be outlawed or discouraged, only healthy sex. The government has no real interest in getting rid of hookers for this reason. Hookers spread sexual dissatisfaction, not the reverse, so they are just what we want. That is why they are still here in such numbers, and always will be. The governments' efforts to clean up this segment are only a smokescreen. The loss of hookers would actually be a governmental tragedy, since it would be a loss of sexual subversion.

The same can be said for porn. Government and business have no real interest in controlling porn. Just the opposite. That is why it is so pervasive. They pretend to be concerned, making little fake runs at it now and then to fool the grandmothers and church ladies, but I wouldn't be surprised to find that porn was subsidized and underwritten by Congress or the CIA. For the vast majority, porn is not an invitation to sexual freedom. Rather, it is the false suggestion that other people are having more sex than you are, and the government knows this. Those who are assuring your continued "civilization" are quite happy for you to look at porn, since it creates dissatisfaction. Despite the fact that all the thousands of porn sites are driven by a few hundred guys worldwide, your average viewer seems to think that half the male population of the world is bedding every budding teenager that passes by, with no consequences. This makes him feel very inadequate. Well, inadequate people buy more stuff, and not just penis enlargement kits and hair plugs. No, they buy cars and clothes and watches and gym memberships and so on and on. And, they work harder, both to buy this stuff, and to keep their mind off sex. It is the perfect racket.

Guys are trapped by porn and hookers and sports and gambling and advertisements and a long list of things I need not go into here. But the girls are trapped in a different way, usually. They are trapped by their mothers and "sisters". Men usually take the blame, of course, but men aren't writing the magazines these girls are reading, the *Cosmos* and *Elles* and *Teens*. Men aren't the primary influence on teen girls, or any girls. Men didn't disallow high-school girls from dating college boys. Men aren't the ones saying "gross" when Lance dates Ashley. If girls are getting mixed signals, it isn't mainly from men or boys. Men and boys are basically capable of one signal, that being "go". No, girls are being traumatized by older women, and it isn't an accident. Just as porn and hookers are no accident for men, anorexia and self-mutilation and all the rest are no accident for young women.

Dressing like sluts is for girls the equivalent of porn for boys. It is no accident that porn is allowed, even encouraged, to boys and men in our society, and likewise it is no accident that girls look like whores. Just as you would think that a society that wanted to redirect sex would proscribe porn, you would think that a society that wanted to subvert the instincts would have strict rules of dress. But this was the old way. The new way actually creates even greater neuroses, and is therefore more useful to civilization.

Porn actually creates more dissatisfaction, as I have shown, and so do the new dress codes for girls. Basically, we tell girls, you can dress like you need sex immediately, but you cannot have sex. You can draw all the horses to your water, but you cannot let them drink. You can bring the fruit to your lips, so close that you can almost taste it, so close that you can smell it, but you cannot take a bite.

It is also no coincidence that my language here is so poignant. The link between food and sex is no tenuous one, no analogy only. The link between anorexia and sexual repression is immediate. It should be no surprise that girls treat food and sex in the same way, starving themselves with one in precisely the way they have learned to starve themselves with the other. In the media we are left with the impression that the blame for anorexia falls on the supermodels and the fashion magazines, but this is purposeful misdirection. Anorexia has little or nothing to do with that, and everything to do with sexual repression. Girls who “just say no” to sex then “just say no” to food. It isn’t hard to see, and the fact that it is ignored is just one more example of media prestidigitation.

Once again, the mixed signals are not an accident. It is not confusion that causes us to disallow sex but allow slutty clothes, it is policy. We need teen girls to be traumatized, and this is a very efficient way to create trauma. Girls raised under such fabulously mixed signals must turn out to be frigid or neurotic, and therefore must turn out to be capable of stupendous amounts of overtime at the office. I am not saying that all mothers are aware of this connection, but business is certainly aware of it, and mothers don’t seem too concerned to counter it, for reasons of their own.

From my point of view, I can’t see that older women seem terribly concerned about younger women. A few of them write books blaming men or supermodels, but they must either be fabulously ignorant or fabulously dishonest to move the argument in that direction. My personal feeling is that many know exactly what they are doing, and that a good portion of them have consciously written off the happiness of their daughters as a cost of feminism, or as a cost of their own petty wars. I have spent years trying to deny that conclusion, but I can do so no longer. I have given them the benefit of the doubt for decades now, since I don’t want to believe that people are like that. But the evidence is too strong and too clear. A people that really cared simply would not let things be like they are.

To believe that mothers really cared about their daughters, one would have to ask what levels of trauma it would take before they did something to ease the girls’ pain. The high-schools are in an absolute meltdown, and it has only gotten worse since Columbine. Do you really think these girls are rebelling against fashion models and men who write for *Playboy*? Do you really think that it is only boys who are the problem? Are only boys Goths? Boys may act *out* more and girls act *in*, but girls are just as violent. Listen to the music, you clueless mothers. Are the girls singing about those bad ole fashion

models and that old pervert Hugh Hefner? No, they don't give a crap about that stuff. They are suffering from your little illogical corrals, your business plans for them, your "just-say-no" lectures, your frigid and prudish and inconsistent expectations. They are suffering from your collusion, conscious or unconscious, with big business and government and media, to keep them unmarried and unsatisfied, so that they can work 60 hours a week and make lots of money and prove how superior women really are. So that they can continue to fight your petty fights and insert your not-so-subtle knives.

That is what this Lance and Ashley story means to me. It is the now unveiled attempt to deny sexual satisfaction to anyone, but first and foremost to young women. In their overriding desire for retribution against men, women have seen that the greatest and cruelest stroke is denying them what they most want. Since what they most want is young women, older women have denied them just that, treating the young women like toys that can be locked in a closet. This is the greatest irony: that is it not men who are treating the young women like toys, it is the older women. Yes, some men are callous, and will treat young women, or any women, like playthings. But most men, I think, tend to treat those they love, and even those they are simply attracted to, with some amount of kindness and consideration. In the worst cases they do this mainly to get what they want (you do not get honey from bees you step on). In the better cases, which were once and still can be the majority of cases, they do this because they are gentlemen, because they want a good relationship, or because they are simply nice people.

But in the sisterhood, all such consideration now seems to be out the window, even among mothers and daughters. Can older women really not see that they have locked away the girls, not for the girls benefit, but for their own? Can they really not see that the girls' problems, like Ashley's problems, are sexual problems? Can they really not see that an even greater danger to young women than gropy uncles or cruising rapists is the danger from older women? Rape and incest are horrible things, and I am not discounting them in the least, but the vast majority of high-school girls have not been raped by anyone, uncles or otherwise. Most young girls are now traumatized by the milieu and by nothing else. They are traumatized by modern life, and do not need to point the finger at some specific bad man. In fact, their biggest problem is that they *can't* point the finger. The worst kind of problem is the problem with no clear and single cause, and the cause of the trauma for most girls remains a ghost. They can't pin it down.

They can't pin it down because it is in the last place they would expect it, the last place they would admit to finding it. It is not some man, and it is not the patriarchy. *It is the matriarchy.* It is their own mothers, stabbing them in the back, consciously and unconsciously.

The problem is not sexual abuse, in most cases. It is sexual repression. Girls are not mainly suffering from bad sex or forced sex or from sex that is too easy. They are suffering from lack of sex, and even more from lack of love. Many teens do have sex, though it is debatable whether more are having sex now than in the past. I suspect, taking all factors into account, that they are having less, but no one really knows. Polling doesn't work well with sex, since it is hard to get a straight answer, and the kids themselves probably don't have a clear idea how much sex is really going on. Certainly, the extreme cases have gotten more extreme, but that is neither here nor there, statistically.

One thing is certain, and it is that those who have sex in high school are much less likely to be on the road to love than those who had teen sex in the 30's, or the 50's, or even the 70's. Young people used to get married, but they don't as much anymore. They not only avoid marriage, they avoid serious relationships, and this is not an accident. It has been planned. It is the outcome of a very successful policy. Both parents and the government want these kids, of both sexes, to go to college and on to jobs. They don't want them wasting time with love or serious relationships or any serious amounts of pleasure. Ideally, they want the sexes just near enough to torture each other, but not near enough to actually relieve each others pains or desires, in any natural way. That is why they are brought into coed schools and then kept busy all day with copy work and useless drudgery, relieved only by "just-say-no" lectures, AIDS lectures, false rape statistics, and other manufactured anxiety.

All this is clear as day to anyone with a speck of honesty or insight, but that category appears to be small and diminishing. Nothing I have said here is new. Foucault (still considered to be on the left) said much of it decades ago, and Freud (surprisingly, now considered to be on the right) said it more than a century ago--not just the second point (which I have already given to him) but also the first point, which falls under the Electra Complex. Applying these ideas to post-Columbine America is my only novelty, and even there I am sure I am not alone. But I am certainly not part of any groundswell either. Those who agree with me are mostly not saying anything. Women would not be expected to attack themselves, and men are in hiding. Fathers have been magnificently outgunned for the past two decades, for reasons that are not really clear to me. The male side of every sexual argument has been silent, or held up only by Camille Paglia. Men are the beneficiaries of a ubiquitous and all-encompassing criticism, but women exist now in a self-created vacuum.

Women have finally managed to build their own pedestal, and, surprise, it turns out to be even loftier than the romantic pedestals we men had perched them upon. We had seen them with stars in our eyes, but the stars in their own eyes are even brighter, the light blinding them to any residue of humanity. They are now free to be goddesses, to sing songs about themselves saying that they are "beautiful in every way." Ladies, can you imagine how ill you would feel, hearing songs by men that claimed they were "handsome in every way"? Can you imagine how ill you would feel, hearing constantly about men and their "god culture."

These symptoms are pathetically transparent, and yet we hear nothing about them. The media leaps on poor Ashley Olsen for dating an older man, but the media has nothing to say about the ridiculous and false and offensive extravagances of feminism, its high-flown and bombastic claims of superiority and transcendence and perfection. Any critique of current sexual politics, as created by women, is pushed into the furthest margins. No, more than that, anyone who has anything to say on the subject, except for flowery praise, is piled on and banished.*

It would appear that fathers don't really care about their daughters or sons either, since if they cared they would find the courage to speak up and fight back. The meltdown at the high school is allowed to continue only with the explicit or tacit collusion of all parents. Mostly, the mothers have made it happen and the fathers have watched it happen, but many or most fathers are also satisfied to see their daughters remain virgins, or sexually miserable, for reasons of their own which must also be clear.

The levels of psychological transparency become greater every year, and this requires ever greater levels of denial. Both the mothers and the fathers have to pretend that what is going on is not going on, and the mothers do this by being more aggressively and stridently dogmatic, while the fathers stare at the wall. That is to say, while the men are catatonic, the women pretend to be on a crusade, one that would justify the cruelty. The women never once allow themselves to consider the possibility that they are on the wrong track. Any suggestion is turned with a debating trick, usually an *ad hominem* device. Any man that would dare to criticize them is perforce a pervert or a child molester or a neocon. No one who did not secretly want to rape and pillage the high school would even suggest that teen girls have a right to a healthy sex life. What kind of monster would even manage to conceive the idea that post-pubescent people should be sexual?

It is amusing to me to find that I am often attacked as a closet neocon, not only for my stance on art but for my stance on sex. It happens this way: women assume that anyone who disagrees with them about anything must be on the far right, since all the guys on the left have been tamed long ago. Beyond this, my old-fashioned belief in love and marriage, and my even more antediluvian idea that teens might benefit from love or marriage, makes me an immediate throwback. Since all throwbacks and old-fashioned people have been predefined as rightists and reactionaries, that is what I must be. But, as anyone who cares to know knows, I am actually far-left in most ways. I voted Green Party in the last three elections, and I am completely unrepentant about working for Ralph Nader. I could go on, but I have posted my bona fides elsewhere and don't need to prove myself in every paragraph of every paper. But the first and greatest irony here lies in the fact that neocons would be the first to disagree with my argument here. They don't want teens having more sex; they would be satisfied to outlaw sex and marriage both until 21. Many of them would be satisfied to outlaw sex altogether, since they have never had any healthy sex and never will (so what's to lose) and since outlawing sex would increase their profit margins (all's to gain).

Twenty years ago I had thought that the pendulum was only swinging toward the feminine in a mostly natural way, and that therefore I must keep my comments relatively balanced. But the pendulum just flies further and further from the clock, arcing out into space. The torque does not diminish; rather it increases exponentially, gaining speed, straining more and more the metal pins and other connections in the mechanism. At this rate, the pendulum arm must soon become detached, flying out into the void, unconnected to anything, a complete fantasy in every way.

Due to the nature of the pendulum, the brake to it cannot be applied from its own side. Women cannot solve this problem. The reverse thrust can only be applied from the opposite side of the arc, pulling the pendulum back to normalcy. Which is to say that men must speak up. It will not be easy. We cannot expect the podium or the microphone to be ceded. The battle has been engaged, unilaterally until now, but we will make no progress pretending there is no war. White flags and suits for peace have been ignored, and we must make a positive and extended defense.

The good news is that many women expect and desire this defense from us, and that even some of the top-level feminists would apparently welcome it, if it arrived in the right form. What was Fay Weldon's "Why all Englishmen are Women" but a dare to us to act like men again?

In this direction, I defend both Ashley Olsen's right to date an older man without a feminist outcry and Lance Armstrong's right to date her without any false "robbing the cradle" comments. I defend men's right to love who they want to, within reason. I defend women's right to love who they want to, within reason. Working back from this (since Ashley Olsen obviously just emerged from this period of life) I must also defend teens of both sexes, and their right to look beyond the high school for love and affection. I defend teens of both sexes, and their right to consider love and marriage a real and viable option, one whose importance must supersede that of business. I defend all our children, of both sexes, who must apparently be protected from the skewed psychologies of both their parents, parents who have become, in many instances, either catatonic or irrational (it is not the kids who are dazed and confused, in the first instance; it is the parents--Dad being dazed and Mom being confused). And I denounce, in the strongest terms possible, this fake and inconsistent Puritanism, prudery, and pathology that permeates our culture, always allied to business and government, and now often allied to neo-feminism. While I remain a feminist in the purest sense, since I believe in equality under the law as well as social and sexual equality, I denounce all the anti-natural and anti-male propaganda now falsely distributed as progressive.

Beyond this, I denounce the schools, especially the high schools, which have now outlived their historical place, and must undergo a total transformation, or be abolished as a psychological and physical blight upon humanity. From its fairly logical position as a place of secondary education, the high school has devolved--within the past four or five decades--into a vast holding cell, like a fattening pen for chickens. It has become a nowhere land, a time out of time, an extended period of sexual denial between the biological time of majority (12, say) and the legal time of majority (18). Because we cannot admit that our children are grown up, we lock them in this Neverland, forcibly buying ourselves another 4-6 years of false authority and power.

What must emerge from this extended time of forced stasis and compression in high school is what we see daily: young people stunted both sexually and mentally. We see 18 year olds who know no more, and often less, than they did at 12, and whose sexuality has been deformed, through lack of light and oxygen, into a crouching beast. We blame rappers for this, and TV, and Hollywood, and so on, but the fault lies in the curriculum itself, the very *modus operandi* and existence of the high school. The music and clothing and all the rest is only a response, not a cause. The cause is the 4-8 year gap between biological adulthood and social adulthood, and it cannot be fixed with dress codes, metal detectors, searches, or heavy police presence. It can only be fixed by opening our eyes to the facts of post-pubescent biology, to the facts of sexuality.

These facts are not different than they were a hundred years ago, or a thousand years ago. The equality of the sexes requires a shift in mores, attitudes, and actions, but it cannot rewrite biology. Specifically, the equality of the sexes has absolutely nothing to do with delaying sexuality for one or both sexes. Delaying sexual majority and denying sexual opportunity to young women has nothing to do with the equal rights movement. Just the reverse, in fact, since young women should have been the first beneficiaries of equality. Young women may have benefited in their test scores, college plans, and job opportunities, but they have certainly not benefited sexually.

The only fact that is different from a hundred years ago is the age of puberty. So while nature moves one way, we move the other, and for no sufficient, or even necessary reason. A logical feminism would have benefited teen girls as much as anyone else, both publicly and personally. It has not done so, and feminism must look to this immediately. Feminism must look more closely at the high school and the teen girl, to discover the real problem at hand. If feminism is not to continue to be seen as complicit in this tragedy--as I have shown that it is--it must break its conscious or unconscious alliance with business and government and all anti-natural religion. All positive aspects of the feminine can be promoted and defended without sacrificing the maiden. Youth does not need to be sacrificed on any altar, great or small. Beauty does not need to be sacrificed on any altar, great or small. And sexuality does not need to be delayed or stunted, on any altar great or small. Least of all upon the altar of business.

**For instance, in my local town library, the book *Who Stole Feminism?*, by Christina Hoff Sommers, has been removed from the shelves and "decommissioned" by the library itself, under pressure from radical feminists (who do not like their statistics investigated). This author's name has been completely purged from the library computers. You would not know she existed.*

Artist's Statement

[From my show at Weinstein Gallery, 2003]

My primary concern is with subject. Everything revolves around choice of subject for me. I begin every painting with the search for the perfect model, for she will represent my subject. Without her I have no inspiration, and I have no painting. I have never been able to use professional models, or the models that are offered at the schools. I have to pay attention wherever I go: the bookstore, the market, the coffeeshop, the drugstore. You never know when your next great inspiration is going to walk by. I keep my portfolio at hand at all times—I have to *prove* I am an artist. Sometimes it takes months—with one important painting it took ten years to find the right models. But I can wait.

Once my subject is in mind and my models have been found, I can begin. But still, the models determine the schedule. Since they are not professionals, I must work around their calendars—school, jobs, band practice. But it is worth it. They are natural, they do not pose. They have real emotions. Not actors or models emotions, but their very own emotions. It is these I use. I don't force them into situations, or suggest poses. I watch. I see what they do. Then I think of a painting that can capture that. You may think this is backwards. Topsy-turvy. But Rodin said, "No, I do not take directions from my models; I take direction from nature."

I have a model closet but I don't like to use it. I prefer nudes. Modern clothes are mostly unpicturesque, and period clothes often look false. But the nude body is both beautiful and emotional, without deception or trumpery. For the same reason I avoid cluttered backgrounds—flowers, patterns, gratuitous objects. I want the viewer to concentrate on the figure, with no distractions.

I rarely paint multifigural works. My concern is not with the relationship between figures, but with the relationship of the viewer and the painting. The emotion should not flow from figure to figure, but from canvas to viewer. You, like me, are voyeur. Art gives you this freedom.

There is no deflection in my work—no politics, no allegory, no storyline (usually). Nothing clever is ever being done. I don't want you to think. Your frontal lobes should shut down; you should enter a dreamstate. To use a modern term, your critical distance should be zero. My art is not about analysis, it is about synthesis.

Now that you have read this, forget it completely. Empty your mind of facts. Swim into the elf-lit room and say nothing to anyone, not even yourself. Not until you have woken up.

Askmen.com 49 Most Influential Men of 2008

by Miles Mathis



Zuckerberg, most influential Trekkie

49. Kevin Rose, Digg
Lil Wayne, rap
Criss Angel, magic
Alex Rodriguez, baseball
Sidney Crosby, hockey
Ryan Seacrest, TV host
Thom Browne, fashion
David Simon/Ed Burns, HBO writers
Lewis Hamilton, Formula One
40. Brett Favre, football
Heath Ledger, actor
Jacques Herzog, architect
J. J. Abrams, TV producer Lost
Andrew Farah, electric car designer
Sam Houser, video games Rockstar
Tiesto, musician
Brad Pitt, actor
Harvey Levin, gossip

Judd Apatow, director *Thirty-year-old Virgin*

30. Rafael Nadal, tennis

Junot Diaz, novel writer

Arnold Schwarzenegger, actor

Liu Peng, Olympics organizer

Jimmy Kimmel, TV host

David Beckham, football

Lakshmi Mittal, Indian billionaire

Jonathan Ive, tech designer iPhone

George Clooney, actor

Usain Bolt, track

20. LeBron James, basketball

Ben Bernanke, politics

Kobe Bryant, basketball

Kanye West, music

Thom Yorke, Radiohead

Jon Stewart, TV host

Dana White, UFC

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook

Tom Ford, fashion

Lorne Michaels, TV producer

10. John McCain, politics

Ronaldo, football

Rob Kay, video games Rock Band

Christian Bale, actor

Gordon Ramsey, TV chef

Stephen Colbert, TV host

Robert Downey, Jr., actor

Michael Phelps, swimming

Steve Jobs, computers

1. Barack Obama, politics

Such a list really makes one wonder why anyone “asks men” anything. Actually, no one does except magazines that want to sell them things, via their advertisers. It's like all those fake polls you see online, made to snag you into some site where they try to market something you don't need and don't want, like an IQ or personality test. The readers who voted in this survey need to take an IQ and personality test—to see if they have one. What do these “influential” men influence anyone to do, exactly? Yes, buy stuff they don't need.

I have been positively influenced by only one of these men, Junot Diaz, via his interesting novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. I had never heard of 21 of them before reading the list. I think

Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart are funny sometimes, but I am not influenced by them. I am influenced by Obama and McCain and Bernanke, but only negatively. They give me a pit in my stomach that won't go away, a low anxiety, a fear of the future, and small desire to get up in the morning.

I don't own a mac, an iphone, any vidgames, a \$5000 suit, don't cook, and don't watch TV, except DVD's of *Bewitched*, so the rest of these bozos, though known to me, do not impress me in the least. An architect might impress me, but not for a sports stadium. Bernini impressed me. Wren impressed me. Modern architecture does not impress me or influence me, except to wish I lived in the past.

I am not impressed by billionaires. Just the opposite: I simply assume they are bigger crooks than the millionaires. Mittal is especially unimpressive. He gave money to Indian Olympians. So what? He delivered steel to the new World Trade Center. So what? More billionaire charity/publicity, learned from J. P. Morgan. I am sure his tax write-off exceeded his charity. Obviously, his robbing exceeds his charity, or he wouldn't be a billionaire.

But let's look closer at some of these names. David Beckham and Ronaldo, influential? If you made a bowling ball by fusing both their petrified brains, you couldn't knock over a matchstick. How can you influence anyone by playing football? You can influence a bunch of kids to buy soccerballs and shoes and jockstraps, but that is about it. Oh, and David can influence straight men to look gay, to wear perfume and use make-up and shave their balls.

Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, influential? How? They never say anything but trash talk. They don't know anything but basketball. They can influence kids to play basketball and to buy \$200 sneakers, and that's it.

Twelve of these guys are athletes and fourteen are actors (I include the politicians as actors). Athletes and actors are not influential, they are just famous. Even the politicians are not really influential, since they are frontmen for those doing the real influencing. You don't influence people by reading off Teleprompts. You fool people into being influenced by the guys behind the curtains, which is a different thing.

The only influencing among these actors was done by Clooney, when he retold the story of Edward R. Murrow in *Good Night and Good Luck*. But that was 2005, and that was propaganda. In other words he was whitewashing Murrow, who was a pawn of the CIA, not some white knight of a free press. In 2008 Clooney was a "messenger of peace" (read pimp) for the United Nations, which has become another front for globalism and climate change propaganda. Clooney, like Anderson Cooper, is either CIA or a CIA pitchman.

Robert Downey, Jr., is on the list for his role in *Ironman*, which also has a political slant to it. Unfortunately, the slant is to further glorify the Pentagon and covert operations like S.H.I.E.L.D (read

C.I.A or N.S.C) while painting Arabs as terrorists. Influence negative, and not Downey's. He didn't write the script, the Pentagon did. He just acted like a putz, as usual: which in his case is not even acting.

Michael Phelps? Influence what, selling *Wheaties*? Mark Zuckerberg? Influence what? C.I.A. front. Government dupe. Then we have two videogame inventors, Sam Houser and Rob Kay. Influence: wasting time and money and making them rich.

Finally, we have the Ultimate Fighting organizer Dana White, way up at number 14. Influence: brain damage, not only on fighters but on viewers.

I'm very surprised we don't have a porn star on this list. But guys wouldn't vote for a male pornstar, except the guys who voted for Thom Browne and Tom Ford and Harvey Levin. Possibly on the "49 most influential women" list we can find Ivana Fuckalot or Marketa. Someone needs to find out who invented Met-Art and nominate his ass for this list. I'd vote for him over Barack Obama anyway.

Beyond that, do you really believe this list was made by voters? Lorne Michaels would have had to buy himself onto the list in the 70's, when Saturday Night Live was actually funny. Even then he would have been outvoted a thousand to one by Chevy Chase or Bill Murray. And Zuckerberg at number 13, ahead of all those actors and athletes? Bull. Another buy in, though maybe the spooks paid his way. Mittal, too. Who of these Ronaldo worshipping, Phelps sucking morons has even heard of Mittal? Same for Liu Peng and Jacques Herzog. No way Peng is going to come within five spots of Usain Bolt, and ahead of Arnold and Brad Pitt. Peng and Herzog are padding.

And ask yourself why Jobs would be number 2 on the list, right after Obama, and Gates wouldn't make the list? We must assume that Askmen.com is subsidized by Jobs and not Gates.

Who else bought in? Kevin Rose of Digg, obviously, since his little tag is right there on the front page, clear as day. He asked them to put him down at number 49, so that it wouldn't be too obvious. Ryan Seacrest has to be sleeping with someone at Askmen, to explain his presence. Seacrest isn't as influential as Elmo and isn't as famous as Big Bird, so he can't be here on merit.

For that matter, I don't believe Diaz got voted onto the list, though I am glad to see him there. Lil Wayne and Dana White voters don't also vote for a Pulitzer prize winner, even if he does write the word "nigger" and talk smack. I can just see it: "Let's see, I think I will vote for David Hasselhof, Gary Coleman, Buckwheat, Bart Simpson . . . oh, and Noam Chomsky." Diaz is a bit of intellectual ballast, the editors hoping his presence would keep guys like me from writing things like this.

Askmen.com 49 Most Influential Men of 2009

by Miles Mathis



Don Draper, fictional winner of a fictional poll

And now from the file of “just when you thought it couldn't get any worse.” If you will remember, for some reason I stooped last year to critiquing the *AskMen* magazine [list of 2008's most influential men](#) (I think I was angry that my vote for the Cookie Monster had been disqualified for a hanging chad). Of course I don't subscribe to any of these magazines, or read them online, but my startpage is at one of those big webservers that serves up a pile of propaganda posing as news everyday, for our edification (brainwashing). Out of sheer curiosity, I click on these items occasionally, to see how far gone we are as a species this week (a scientist must keeps tabs on everything, including that). So last year I came up with a few recommendations based on my reading of the list, leading with the recommendation that you don't ask the modern man anything, if you want a sensible answer (not that I am anti-male: I could say the same for women and their magazines, but that is another paper).

Now here I am once more, a glorious year later, wasting another hour in between real projects that take real concentration, amusing myself and possibly you by addressing again the preposterousness of modern culture (and making up words). I was led into this by the headline at Yahoo that Don Draper had been voted the most influential man of 2009. Since I don't watch TV (except occasional reruns of *Bewitched* on DVD), my immediate reaction was, “hunh?” It turns out Don Draper is a fictional character, the lead of the TV show “*Mad Men*,” currently airing at AMC. This slapped me in the face with irony without having to know more, since we find the mad men of the 21st century yearning to be fictional characters, despite the fact that the majority of them already are. For the most part and in general,

modern males look, act, and speak like androids improperly programmed to mimic human behavior; like holograms beamed to the earth by aliens—aliens not fully versed on the complete creature; like two-dimensional, slick-paper punch-outs from a Dick and Jane story. I find myself feeling the edges of people I meet, to see if the perforations are still intact. This tells me how long they have been out of the book (or novelization, actually).

I will return to that metaphor, but I want to switch gears for a moment. Upon closer inspection of the actual article in *AskMen*, I quickly tasted the aura of the piece. After spitting for many minutes, I put it into this prosaic form: the whole thing is a fake. The poll and the voting and so on is a sham. It never happened, or if it did, the results were pushed. Not that men aren't misguided enough to vote for a fictional character, but in this case I don't believe they did. I propose that *AskMen* is a front for big business and that it has clandestine ties to the media in all forms. What it did, most likely, is take bids from all over the western world: AMC simply posted the high bid. This list is just an advertisement posing as a poll. *AskMen* didn't ask men anything, it asked advertisers for bids.

This is another reason we find Don Draper at the top of the fake poll. Yes, Don Draper is a top advertising director in the show. So we may guess that real advertising directors—the ones making or recommending these bids—are the biggest fans of Don Draper. They love to see their own business glorified.

I have let the modern man off the hook to a small degree, since this election, like all modern elections, was stolen. If there were any votes from actual human men, they were stuffed and padded and extended by votes from big business. The votes were counted by Diebold. However, it remains true that "Mad Men" is a very popular show, so we must reel in the modern man once more, hooking him heavily in the cheek. I took the time—the subtle and mischievous gods know why—to study this Don Draper, and he is not the sort of fake person a real person would choose to be influenced by, or even entertained by. First of all, we have that advertising thing. Not to put too fine a point on it, most big advertisers are scum. They are professional liars, paid to sell useless and often harmful products to people who don't need and don't want them. Don Draper is based on the real-life (I say that generously) character Draper Daniels, the head of a big Chicago agency in the 1950's that created the Marlboro Man campaign. QED: Point proved. Draper Daniels was paid big money to make lung cancer look sexy, and the producers of "Mad Men" are paid big money to make a shallow phony like Don Draper look sexy.

Draper (Jon Hamm) looks great in a vintage suit and hat, and he has lots of affairs, and that is the real reason the show is popular. The men who watch and supposedly voted here do so because they yearn for a slick job where they can wear expensive suits and bed younger women at will. If they have to take a job that sells death and ruination and sin by disguising it as health and vigor and uprightness, well, so what? If they have to be surrounded by a entire class of fake, plastic people, so what? If the young women they "get" to bed are also fake and plastic and annoying and shallow, so what? This is what they want, and they will want it until they get it. Only then will they realize they were on the wrong road. By then they are 50 or 60, and have been smoking and drinking martinis for 40 years, so they are

incapable of bedding anyone, least of all a beautiful, sensible woman.

Don't pretend this is what the show is teaching them, because it isn't. It is teaching them just the opposite: it is teaching them to want all these things. The advertisers behind the show need them to want all these shiny plastic things, because that is what they sell. They sell suits and hats and gym memberships and hair transplants and make-up for men and so on and on. The show is glorifying the American male, hiding that glorification a bit by taking it back to the '50's. But by going back to the past, the glorification can be extended and heightened, since the human mind has always been a sucker for nostalgia. There may be something wrong with the contemporary male, but Oh! if we could just go back to the '50's, when men were men.

Infantile, pathetic, deluded, yes, but it sells like hotcakes. Sell the American male a earlier form of himself, a Hemingway-ified, John Galt-ified paean to manhood, to keep him from noticing that his current form of banal narcissism is a direct outcome of these earlier forms.

And, hey, we can now sell him hats, too! I know without even looking that the hat is making a comeback in NYC and LA, since I can see that this was one of the goals going in. We have no new ideas, in fashion or anywhere else, so recycle the old ideas. The hat is a product that costs money, so bring it back! If the advertisers were really thinking, they would bring back watch chains and ruffled collars and shoe buckles and handkerchiefs and gloves and monocles and codpieces and anything else that was ever worn in history. What they want to do is load the modern man down with products, so he should be wearing at least 50 pounds of garments, toiletries and dry goods at any one time, even while asleep.

Just to show you what a farce this all is from the word go, let us return to the backstory. We are told that Don Draper was in the Korean War. That figures, since war is always part of the story of the American man. But he isn't any sort of hero. That would be too obvious. No, Draper actually killed his army buddy in an accident, but rather than take responsibility for that, he switched identities, changed the story, and was awarded a purple heart. To say it another way, he found a way to be rewarded for killing a friend. And he was doubly rewarded, because this friend was upwardly mobile, while he was not. The show doesn't dwell on this; rather, it spins it. This doesn't make Draper a creep, we are made to feel, it makes him "mysterious." Like Gatsby and Ted Bundy, his good looks allow him to get away with this and a lot more, but the audience never calls him on it. Why? We may assume it is because they wish to be good looking enough to get away with stuff. They wish to buy a suit, a hat, and a position, so that they may dodge responsibility indefinitely. That's a positive influence for you.

As per the modern advertising blueprint, *AskMen* sells all this as just the opposite of what it is. The blurb for number 1 leads with this: "Draper values personal honor." No he doesn't! He has a purple heart for killing his friend. That is the opposite of honor. He works in advertising. That is the opposite of honor. Then we are told this: "Don Draper's business culture might have its share of viciousness and intrigue, but it's also one in which identity and personal accountability is sacrosanct." Advertising in the

'50's was about the sanctity of accountability? Hardly. Advertising in the '50's was the same as it is today, when these advertisers at *AskMen* can lie right to your face. As long as the lie has a picture of George Clooney and Brad Pitt next to it, you will take it and thank them for it.

But enough of Don Draper. At number 3 on this list, we have another fictional character, President Obama. Obama is just a high-priced pitchman, selling the military, banking, oil, and globalist product of his corporate backers. He is the Marlboro Man in blackface, convincing you to buy a hundred forms of cancer. Smiling in his expensive suits and male make-up, he reads from the teleprompters to convince you that we need to give the banksters another free trillion, that we need to torture people who have been charged with nothing, that we need to be at war all over the world, that we need to give up freedom for security, that we need new taxes, that we need to move on. It is hard to believe that the Pentagon and Goldman Sachs and Exxon-Mobil were outbid by AMC, but we may assume that Obama's promoters don't feel they need to top every list. That would look suspicious. Besides, Draper needs the promotion more than Obama right now. Obama has been on the TV everyday for three straight years. Even Goldman Sachs understands the meaning of oversaturation.

Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook's face) is at number 4! He shelled out some major dough for this placement, I would guess, but, hey, the CIA is paying him very well. He can afford it. Does anyone over age 8 actually believe that a human manchild, no matter how braindead, would vote for Zuckerberg without the CIA waterboarding him first?

Simon Cowell is at number 5. Gee, Obama must be pleased to be on the same list with Simon Cowell. The President is only marginally more influential than the host of the Gong Show, and marginally less influential than a phony actor playing a phony character on a soap opera. *AskMen* says, "You can't help but admire the man behind *American Idol*." Somehow, I can help it. I guess I am just like that: I never had to eat a whole bag of Lays potato chips, either, and I never did like-a that spicy meatball, and I never wanted to be an Oscar Meyer wiener.

Michael Jackson is at number 6. Somebody really knows how to sell records. This bid is perfectly timed, since all the re-releases are still on the shelves and on the charts. If Epic didn't buy itself this placement, I need more proof.

Down in the 40's, we have both Jacques Herzog and Santiago Calatrava. This is just more circumstantial evidence this list was rigged. How many American men have even heard of these guys? They have to be buy-ins. On a real list, made from actual votes, these two would not make the top 10,000. Maybe a few architects do read *AskMen*, but they are still going to be outvoted 1,000 to one by the sports and actor voters. In a real poll, Herzog and Calatrava would be below Gary Coleman, Larry the Cable Guy, Tom Bosley, and the 1980 hockey team's third alternate.

Same for Italo Zucchelli. This is just the Calvin Klein entry this year. Nobody voted for this guy. Nobody.

Robert Pattinson is another buy-in, this time from Hollywood. I could see Pattinson high on a list voted on by teenage girls, but the guys that were supposed to have voted for Draper and Usain Bolt and Lebron James wouldn't vote for pretty-boy Pattinson.

Andre Balazs, who owns a posh hotel in New York, is presented to us as a top vote-getter. Nope. I don't have to believe everything I read, and I don't believe this. What I believe is that Andre actually got fewer votes than Zucchelli. By my rules, he voted for himself, was penalized one vote, so his total is -1.

Jeff Bezos. Who are these people? Actual human men are going to vote for the founder of Amazon? Sure, and next year they will vote for the executive vice-president of marketing at Ebay and the copy boy at Mozilla and the bike messenger at Oracle.

Bear Grylls is the Discovery channel rep on the list, a handsome phony positioned to make you go to REI and spend \$120 on a pair of pants that you could get at Old Navy for \$15. Grylls holds the record for indoor freefall, among other things, which is again ironic. The American or British male has been in indoor freefall for about a century now, which makes Grylls record of an hour and a half seem paltry. Grylls also paramotored over Angel falls with an expeditionary group in an attempt to reach the highest, most remote mesa in South America. . . where they could leave a few empty Dasani bottles and Powerbar wrappers. He circumnavigated the British Isles on a JetSki (really), adding ten thousand gallons of petrol and exhaust to the biosphere, and holds the record for highest open-air dinner party (truly), at 25,000 feet, under a hot-air balloon. In practice for this important and memorable feat, he made over 200 parachute jumps, wasting enough fossil fuel to light Rwanda for a month. In future, he will attempt to circumnavigate his own ego on a raft inflated by his own carbon offsets. The trip is expected to take 11 weeks, with favorable winds.

If you don't believe in buy-ins, check out Gary Vaynerchuk at number 18. Gary is a wine critic, sandwiched in this list between Ashton Kutcher and Ryan Seacrest. Does Ashton even know how to spell wine? Can Ryan remove a cork, from his ass? The wine business must be good, is all I can say, if Gary can afford to buy in above Seacrest and Clooney and Pitt.

Jack Dorsey is just a lower-ranked Zuckerberg. Dorsey is the guy behind Twitter, which will last into next year, maybe, when it will be replaced by Twatter. Again, I bet no one voted for this guy except his own executives and bankers and agents.

Likewise, Tom Ford is a higher placed Zucchelli. Ford simply outbid Calvin Klein for this placement.

Dana White, of Ultimate Fighting, is one more example of my thesis. He has money to buy this sort of promotion. This list is nothing more than propaganda for big business. It is a transparent and ridiculous fictional poll topped by a fictional character, in a fictional country on a fictional planet in a universe

only statistically and hypothetically allowed to exist (check Wikipedia if you don't believe me: page: quantum mechanics).

If this paper was useful to you in any way, please consider donating a dollar (or more) to the SAVE THE ARTISTS FOUNDATION. This will allow me to continue writing these "unpublishable" things. Don't be confused by paying Melisa Smith--that is just one of my many *noms de plume*. If you are a Paypal user, there is no fee; so it might be worth your while to become one. Otherwise they will rob us 33 cents for each transaction.

THE ILLOGIC OF ATHEISM

by Miles Mathis



Richard Dawkins

August 25, 2009

Most people arriving here will assume I am a Christian or at least a theist. I am not. I am also not an agnostic. To be an agnostic is to be a doubter. But to doubt you must have a certain amount of information. A computer with insufficient data is not agnostic, for instance. A computer does not doubt, it reserves judgment. It refuses to give a conclusion when a conclusion is not in the numbers.

Now, humans are not computers. I am not a materialist and not reductive, so I would never make that argument. I am only making a loose analogy here. I do not even call myself a skeptic, since the word has been polluted by modern use. A modern skeptic is like an agnostic, and he or she is likely to lean to a “no” answer every time. Are there gods? Probably not. Are there unicorns? Probably not. Is there a Bigfoot? Probably not. And so on. I resist this “skeptic” tag because leaning toward a “no” answer is a prejudice itself. It is unscientific. Beyond that, the so-called skeptic societies are stiff with atheists and agnostics and cynics and other faux-scientists, and I prefer to remain as far away from all that as possible.

Of course, with the existence of Bigfoot and unicorns and so on we do have a great deal of information. We have made searches. The Earth is a limited environment and we have populated it widely and heavily and long. Even so, the mountain gorilla was not discovered until 1902, and huge populations of lowland gorillas were only recently discovered in the Congo (this very decade). Which is to say that we may lean a bit to a “no” answer for existence of larger beings in smaller areas we have scoured quite thoroughly, but even then we may be wrong.

But in looking for proof of gods, our search is pathetically limited. By definition, a god is a being whose powers are far greater than ours, who we cannot comprehend, and whose form we cannot predict. This would make our failure to locate a god quite understandable. A very large or small god would be above or below our notice, and a distant god would also evade our sensors. Not to mention we only have five senses. If we are manipulated by gods, as the hypothesis goes, then it would be quite easy for them to deny us the eyes to see them. Only a god of near-human size in the near environs would be possible to detect.

Again, this does not mean I believe in gods, any more than I believe in aliens or unicorns. I only point out that, as a matter of logic and science, a hypothesis that has not been proved is not the same as a hypothesis that has been disproved. I agree with the atheists and agnostics that the existence of gods has not been proved, but I do not agree that the existence of gods has been disproved. It would require a much more thorough search of the universe than has so far been completed to even begin to lean. As it is, our data is near-zero.

For this reason, I find atheists to be just as sanctimonious, illogical, and tiresome as the deists and theists, if not moreso. Because the atheists are often more highly educated and often better able to argue (in limited ways), they use this education and argument to prop themselves up in the ugliest ways. They blow apart the beliefs of religious people and imagine this solidifies their own beliefs in some way. But it never does. People of faith are actually more consistent in their views, since they never claim to believe in science anyway. They are not immediately hypocritical, at least, since it is possible for them to create a closed system of illogic that circles back in a self-affirming way. The search for truth is no part of their system, so it is no failure when they find none. But atheists cannot say the same. They base their system on science, so that the very first instant they fail to act scientifically, they are back to zero. Yes, it is the same zero as the theists' zero, but the theists aren't measuring and the atheists are. A theist at zero is just a theist, and no harm done. But an atheist at zero has had a fall, and must be damaged.

To put it in philosophical terms, the atheist has chosen a position that is epistemologically stronger than the theist. By stronger, I do not mean that the atheist is more likely to be right, I mean that the position of the atheist requires more proof. The theist does not say he *knows* that God exists, he says he *believes* it. Faith is a belief whereas knowledge is a certainty. This gives the religious person some wiggle room. He doesn't need to talk of proofs, since a belief is never based on proofs. Belief and faith are built mainly on willpower. Atheists will say that such a foundation is quicksand, and I tend to agree, but

atheists stand in even waterier mud. The atheist claims to be quite certain that there is no god, and he claims to be contemptuous of unsupported belief, so he must provide us with some firm foundation for his "knowledge." This he can never do. If there are no proofs that God or gods exist, there are also no proofs they do not exist. The atheist is just as unscientific as the theist. The atheist's stance is just as mired in belief as the theist's, but the atheist also claims to disdain belief. So he must disdain himself.

[Notice that my argument is not one of meaning or definitions. This is why I do not consider it to be equivalent in any way to atheism or theological noncognitivism. I think it is clear that both the definition of a god and the question of the existence of a god are meaningful (or can easily be made so). My argument in this paper is not about definitions or meaning, or about metaphysics; it is mainly about the intelligence of humans. Given our limited ability to spot evidence and to collate it and interpret it, we would require much more "conclusive" evidence than a being that was more intelligent. For another god, the evidence of gods might be clear at a glance. For us, all the hard evidence in the world might not suffice, since we could not recognize it for what it was. This means that my argument is also not a variation of "we can't know." Given more data and more intelligence, I believe we could know, but the fact is we have nowhere near enough of either, which makes all the talk on both sides wearying to me.]

Atheists always attack theists for being inconsistent, but atheists are wildly inconsistent themselves. For one example, let us consider [Christopher Hitchens](#). Hitchens has been called one of the four horsemen of atheism (along with Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris), and knowing him, it is likely a self-naming and self-glorification. Problem is, Hitchens is also famous for saying,

My own pet theory is that, from the patterns of behavior that are observable, we may infer a design that makes planet earth, all unknown to us, a prison colony and lunatic asylum that is employed as a dumping ground by a far-off and superior civilizations.

Hmmm. I suspect that the other three horsemen would have preferred he hadn't said that. Why? Because proof of a superior civilization using the Earth as a dumping ground would be proof of gods, heaven, hell, judgment, and a host of other things. If the Earth is a dumping ground for the unfit, that makes it hell, or very close, and makes the planet of the superior civilization heaven, or very close. It makes the superior civilization a race of gods, since they have powers we do not, are unknown to us, and have long evaded our detection. And to find us unfit, they must judge us, almost as a god does. Since we are born here, not transported bodily here in later life, we are either damned as spirits, which would prove a soul, or we are damned by the lives of our ancestors, which would prove a "sins of the fathers" theory. Regardless, it is clear that Hitchens, no matter his opinion of Christians, has a heavy Biblical residue. Also notice that he believes all this without proof, and without apology for his lack of proof. Clearly, he is allowed to believe what he wants to, while other people can't, even when his beliefs are shadows of theirs. Why he is allowed when they aren't is not so clear, but we may conjecture that it is because he is a loudmouthed bully.

In his book *God is not Great*, one of Hitchens' central theses is that religions are contemptuous of free

inquiry, intolerant, irrational, and coercive to children. All true, but outside of religions, these things hold as well. These faults are not limited to religious people. Almost all people are contemptuous of free inquiry, intolerant, irrational, and coercive, including of course Christopher Hitchens. Atheists and scientists are often or always irrational and intolerant, and extremely coercive. Why else attack another man's god? Modern science pretends to be free, but it isn't even close. All the contemporary theories are heavily fortified and policed, and they are famous for immediately blacklisting anyone who asks intelligent questions. Modern science consists of only two categories: those who agree with every word of the standard models, and cranks. Science in all fields has ossified into dogma, which is why it has stopped advancing. Physics, for example, hasn't made a jot of theoretical headway in almost a century. It has spent the last eight or nine decades loading the old theories down with mathematical formalisms and other jargon, and building the walls as high as possible. I know this firsthand.

Another thesis in Hitchens' book is that religion is bad for your health, since it is sometimes hostile to modern medicine. Ironical this, coming from a fat drunk who smokes two packs a day. Beyond that, we hope Hitchens got some money from big pharma for his plug. He doesn't mention all the health problems caused by overdrugging the modern person, or the cocktail of chemicals this person swims in daily, from the pollution of air, water and food by science, industry, and military. He apparently expects us to believe that modern health problems are caused mainly by a few "religious nuts" refusing treatment, rather than by a purposeful or negligent general poisoning of the entire population by mercury, lead, fluoride, carbon monoxide, diesel, benzene, PVC, dioxin, Roundup, sulfur dioxide, nitric oxide, and so on.

Hitchens then claims, quoting Laplace, that "He didn't need religion to explain things and neither do we." Implying that either he or Laplace can answer all the big questions. You don't have to read all of Laplace or Hitchens to see if they can. I will tell you: they don't even try to answer most of the big questions. We know that Hitchens is no theorist or mathematician, so we can ignore him. But Laplace was also no theorist. He was mainly a mathematician, and most of the work he did was in [mucking up classical mechanics](#) with more lengthy and obscuring math. His most famous work was in celestial mechanics, where he recast the formulations of Kepler and Newton into differential equations and pushed them in various ways. He claimed to solve old problems with orbits (of Saturn and Jupiter) in this way, although [I myself have shown he did not do this](#). All he did is cover up the real holes in Kepler and Newton, hiding the mistakes under his more lengthy computations. Laplace's work is one of the main historical reasons that celestial mechanics has remained flawed up to the present time.

So Laplace was wrong about even these very limited mechanical problems. About god, he has nothing important to say, as we would expect. I don't know anyone in history who has had anything important to say about god, since we may be quite certain that no one, atheist or theist, knows what they are talking about when they start talking about god or gods, either for or against.

Hitchens also claims that the Old Testament is an unnecessary nightmare. Again, true, but atheists like Hitchens have replaced it with their own nightmare. Modern society is a different nightmare, one we

may not dismiss as fiction since we see it for ourselves. Hitchens says himself, in his recent diatribes against funny women, that life is a joke, a bitch, a mess, and so on, but the mess is no longer mainly one of religion. Religion is no longer in charge. Industry is in charge, propelled by corrupt science. If god is dead among the intelligent and elite, as he claims and as I accept, then he cannot lay the modern nightmare at the feet of the Abrahamic religions.

Atheists always take negative proof against a religion as positive proof for themselves, but this is both lazy and false. We see this with Darwinism, DNA, carbon dating, and so on and on. We have proved that the Earth was not created in 4004BC, so we have disproved a certain claim of certain Christians. So what? It isn't much. We have evidence the Earth is more like 4.5 billion years old, but it is not clear how this number, even if it is totally accurate, precludes gods or creation. An Earth that was infinitely old would logically preclude gods or creation, but an Earth with a beginning yields just as well to the story of Genesis as the younger Earth. To be clear, I don't believe in a single solitary claim of Genesis or the rest of the Bible, so do not mistake my argument. But a very old Earth does not score any points for atheists, either. Nebular models and solar disks and gravitational collapses are just as squishy and hypothetical as Genesis, and the origin of life from atoms bumping like poolballs is even more tenuous. Nor does replacing poolball mechanics with probabilities and gauge fields and tensors impress me. None of the new math has come near answering the old questions: we have simply been forbidden from asking them anymore.

Scientists will say that the current models are superior to Genesis, at any rate, since one who accepts Genesis doesn't continue to ask how the Earth evolved. This much is true. Good scientists continue to study, while religious people and bad scientists do not. But this paper is not about good scientists, it is about bloated atheists and bad scientists, the sort that think they already know how things are. They have barebones models of the early Earth, models less than a century old and ever-changing, and they think they can claim with certainty how things are, who exists and who does not, how things got here and where they are going. They think a theory of how things evolved is equivalent to a theory of how things were created. They think a model of a complex twisting molecule is the same as a blueprint for life or a explanation of self-locomotion or a proof of phylogeny. They think that four-vector fields and non-abelian gauge groups and statistical analysis explain existence, complexity, solidity, and change.

To be specific, let us look first at DNA. The princes of DNA like James Watson are among the ugliest scientists that ever existed. Watson is a strange atheist, in that he obviously finds himself to be godlike. But let us look at the actual content of his work. DNA is used by the cells as a source of information. It tells them how to build other parts of the cell as well as the greater body of the organism. But if we look closer, we find very great mysteries, ones that are never mentioned. For a start, the DNA strand itself is built and replicated by enzymes. These enzymes can cut the strand as well as move around the sugars and phosphates that make up the strand. Problem is, to do this, the enzymes must have self-locomotion and a sort of intelligence. The DNA tells the cell what to do, but what tells the enzymes what to do? We have a *reductio* at precisely this point. We are told that the body and cells do what they do because the DNA instructs them to do it, but why and how do the enzymes do what they do? There

is no room for a blueprint inside the tiny enzyme. What propels it? Even more to the point, what propels it in the proper direction, at the proper time, to do the proper thing? I am not proposing that a god tells them, by whispering in their tiny ears, I am just showing that the discovery of DNA is no great step to understanding the origins of life. DNA is just a code, but it takes a sort of intelligence to create a code, another one to replicate it, and a third to decipher it. For this reason, DNA can in no way be a source of intelligence at any level, either cellular or human.

That is why I fail to see how Watson's work as a scientist supports his certainty as an atheist. The discovery of DNA does not even push us a tiny step closer to atheism. A code, any code, is indication of neither theism nor atheism. A code is only a code, and unless some information about gods is encoded directly on the strand, we have proof of nothing. Codes can be manufactured, we know that. Codes may also be natural, although that is only a conjecture at this time. To believe in manufactured codes is easy, since we can manufacture them ourselves. To believe in natural codes is not as easy, since we must be shown how a code can generate itself.

In fact, this is probably the strongest real argument of the theist. The theist states that, intuitively, the self-generated code is impossible to imagine. This intuition is not a proof of course, or even a strong indication, but as a bald postulate, the idea is as solid as any other. How can electrons and protons and mesons and so on, rushing around in gravitational and E/M fields, accidentally stick together or form structures, just as a matter of statistics, forming codes that other accidental conglomerations have a use for? Such a theory is just as fantastic as any other religious assertion, surely. The theist proposes these structures are not accidents, while the atheist demands that they must be. It is fantastic if they are and fantastic if they are not. It is beyond comprehension, proof, or all argument either way. The argument is ultimately beyond all math and logic, because all math and logic must begin with a postulate. This postulate of accident or no accident is the first postulate of all physical theory. It requires an unfounded belief either way.

Now let us move on to Darwinism or evolution. Evolution provides a mechanism for species change, via mutation and selection. This mechanism is both ingenious and well-supported. One must be impressed with Anaximander and Chambers and Wallace and Darwin and all the others who thought of it. The problem is, it is not a complete theory of life on Earth, even as a skeleton. It cannot explain even the broader points of speciation, since it cannot explain how equal environments create unequal selection. To take one example, the Serengeti is a pretty consistent environment. The lions and giraffes and zebras and so on live in the same grass, in the same air, drink the same water, under the same trees. What, precisely, caused them to evolve so differently, not as individuals, but as species? Mutation happens to individuals, not to species. A mutation happens to a gene, which is expressed in a specific offspring or set of offspring. These offspring, if superior, then deliver the gene to the whole herd over time, which then disseminates it further. So far, so good. But return to the individual offspring. Say we are evolving a giraffe by this method. The required mutation is then a long neck. But this mutation is only useful to a creature that is already a giraffe or pre-giraffe. The mutation will not help a pre-lion or a pre-zebra, since the lion eats meat, not leaves, and the long neck would just slow the zebra down. The

mutation is useful only to an animal that is already living under trees, already trying to reach higher leaves. But if it could not reach the leaves before the mutation, why was it there? Was it just hanging around, looking up at those unused leaves, waiting for a mutation? The combination of specific mutation and specific environment is so unlikely that even great time cannot explain it.

What about the orchid with a four-inch tube, which requires a fly with a four-inch nose to pollinate it? The mutations cannot take great time to sync up, they must do so immediately or one or both species will fail. If the flower mutates to a five inch tube first, the fly cannot reach the nectar and quits visiting it. If the fly mutates to a five inch nose first, the pollen is not deposited on him, and the flower again fails. Neither species can wait around for accidental mutations of just the right sort. They must evolve together, and this is so unlikely as a matter of mutation statistics that it must show up the theory as a whole.

This is not to say that natural selection is wrong, but it is far from complete. Even the selection itself is not understood. Arthur Koestler pointed out that natural selection is very near a tautology, and his argument is hard to counter. Useful traits are useful because they are selected, and they are selected because they are useful. Not a theory with a lot of content. For instance, since it is the environment that selects the useful mutations, we must assume that the environment likes the mutated organism more than the pre-mutated organism. The new organism is “stronger” or “fitter”, which must mean it is better adapted to the current environment. If so, why did the environment put up with the weaker pre-mutation organism? As we keep turning back the clock, we get to organisms that are less and less fit, but still viable. By this way of looking at it, history should be a straight chronological progression from less fit to more fit (minus environmental cataclysms). Is this what we see in the fossil record? Not really. It is not clear that later species are more perfect than earlier species. We can't see what criteria nature is using. You see, we have no method for determining “fitness” except survival. “This individual or species survived, therefore nature must have preferred it, therefore it must be more perfect.” It is circular. If you don't know nature's criteria, then you don't really know much about selection. You only give a name to a mechanism. As Osborn put it long ago, “The *causes* of the evolution of life are as mysterious as the *law* of evolution is certain.”

Another problem is the loss of sexual selection. Although Darwin devoted an entire book to it (*The Descent of Man*, 1871), sexual selection has since been mostly re-absorbed into natural selection. Wallace disagreed with sexual selection, especially the power of choice of females, and important experiments have shown that females of many species cannot differentiate between “plumaged” and non-plumaged males. This begs for another scientific explanation of bright colors and ornaments seen in nature, an explanation that has not yet arrived. Rather than become more rigorous, modern evolutionary theory has become less rigorous, and negative data is often buried or lost.

We see this again with the lack of new species and the gaps between species. Although Darwin claimed that nature made no jumps (*natura non facit saltum*), we do not see a continuous progression of states between species, either in life or in the fossil record. Nor have we been able to create a new species

either by push breeding or by accelerating mutations by X-rays or other means. Recently (2002), in experiments with yeast, scientists were able to create a new species by cross-breeding two species of yeast. When the new individual auto-fertilized itself, it was able to continue the new species. The problem here is that no higher organisms can auto-fertilize. Even the new yeast could not propagate with other members of its parent species, and cross-bred higher forms are almost always infertile. If they can breed with the parent stock, they are not a new species, by definition. If they can't, they die out. It would require two simultaneous cross-breedings of precisely the same sort, creating two members of the new species, each of the opposite sex, and both fertile. This hasn't been achieved in breeding experiments, which are controlled, and it is exponentially more unlikely to happen in nature, where multiple viable cross-breedings would have to take place at precisely the same time and place, purely by chance. So this experiment is limited to yeasts and other auto-fertilizers, and cannot be a general proof of evolution.

This *non facit saltum* problem then leads us to the Cambrian explosion, which Darwin found to be a major problem, and which is still a major problem. Evolutionists like Dawkins pretend to a surety they don't have, and we see this again with the Burgess shale, which was not studied closely until the 1970's. Much of our best data is very young, that is to say, and we need far more data than we have. We are only beginning to be able to theorize intelligently, and I would say that very much of current theory is just speculation. As with black holes, our theory has so far outstripped our data. People have written books they basically had no right to be writing.

To get a taste of this, you only have to read the page at Wikipedia on the Cambrian explosion. Even now, we have far more theories than we have data, and those who had thought evolution had been set in stone since the time of Darwin will be shocked to find the theory is still so embryonic to this day. We actually know almost nothing about how the Earth has evolved, [either regarding geology](#) or speciation or anything else.

We also find that although the mainstream has been claiming for about 150 years that acquired traits couldn't be inherited, we now that they can and are. As just one example, researchers have taught mice to be afraid of certain colors or sounds, then proved that their offspring are also afraid of them. Can that be explained by chance mutations? Of course not. How can it be explained? They don't even try. They just shoo you away from the obvious realization it conflicts with Darwinism.

Again, I am not proposing that evolution is wrong or suggesting a return to any form of intelligent design. I am not proposing that God or any gods caused the Cambrian explosion, created plumage for strictly aesthetic reasons or their own pleasure, or that God or gods create or accelerate new species after a cataclysm. I am not proposing that God or gods monitor the progress of every bird and flower, to keep them in proper relative form. I am simply pointing out that our science in all fields and subfields is very incomplete, not to say underdeveloped, and that scientists, and therefore atheists, should be less strident. Religious people are often or usually very ignorant, it is true, but scientists are only marginally less ignorant. Even the smartest of us know almost nothing about the universe.

But the greatest problem with evolution is contained in its name. It is a theory of evolution, not of creation or birth or incipience. It proposes a mechanism for how life changes, not how it begins. To be a variant answer to Genesis, it would have to propose a mechanism for the beginnings of life, and this it does not even pretend to do. The Earth is not infinitely old, therefore there must have been some beginning to life. Short of spores arriving from outerspace or a miraculous lightning strike, we still have no viable theory for this. We have not been able to bombard inorganic molecules with cosmic rays or any other field that has turned it into living matter. We have not been able to build even a protozoan or a virus or an enzyme from the ground up, from atoms or elements, or to diagram how nature did it. We don't know how the mitochondria got into the cell or why, or where they were before the cell. For all these reasons and many others, it is strictly illogical for the scientists to force evolution upon religious people as a counter-explanation to their own creation myths. Since evolution has never been an explanation of creation, evolution is not in necessary conflict with any creation theory. Creationists, although often annoying, are not preventing anyone from studying the origins of life on this planet. Their meddling with grade school textbooks in the red states is often absurd, but this has not, and could not, affect research at the graduate and post-graduate levels in the various disciplines, where it actually gets done. We are not losing large numbers of potential scientists to fundamentalist Christian families, and we may not be losing any. Science cannot force families to raise their children on accepted principles without becoming even more fascist than it already is. Biologists, chemists, physicists, engineers, and geologists should simply pursue their work and leave the religious people to their own devices. Until the Christians invade the science departments, it is simply unnecessary to debate them or berate them.

Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins and others often pretend that they are only in a defensive posture, and that their attacks upon religion are only counter-attacks, but I don't buy it. Although I was born and raised in the Bible Belt, I have always felt more pressed by the dogma of modern science than the dogma of modern religion. I have felt more keenly and more often the peer pressure and judgment of zealous and protective scientists than the scorn of fundamentalist preachers. It is easy for those who wish to avoid the prayer meetings and the proselytizing. In the universities these people play a small role. Not so the scientific fundamentalists who run the academic world with an iron fist. In the science departments you are expected to "shut up and calculate." One serious question makes you a pest and two serious questions makes you a dangerous person. A truly sharp mind is not an asset, it is threat to the careers of your professors. They want students that are sharp enough to assist them in their research, but not sharp enough to see through them and their equations. And if a student can see through the equations of their heroes (like Laplace), alarm bells go off all over the academic world. Science is not looking for the next Newton, it is looking to get funded again next year.

Just as it isn't really medical refuseniks who are the threat to health in the modern world, it isn't the fundamentalist Christians who are the real threat to science. It is entrenched scientists who are the threat to scientific advancement. It is entrenched physicists who blockade progress in physics, entrenched mathematicians who blockade progress in math, and so on. Christians simply don't have the

power or the position or the authority to block anything at the university or institutional level. Only a few tenured professors who have published widely have that power, and they know how to use it. It is not the page on Jesus or Moses or Yahweh or Mohammed at Wikipedia that stops all progress in particle physics, it is the pages on particle physics that do that. And the page on particle physics is there to do just that. Wikipedia was created for just that purpose, and that page was created for just that purpose. It was written by insiders to sell their theories to the public. Like the theory of evolution, each scientific theory in each field is sold as true and complete and verified, although it never is. Each theory is an embryonic theory, full of holes, and verified only in small part, if at all. Each theory is full of contradictions and paradoxes and inconsistencies, and, as written at Wikipedia, each theory is padded and fluffed with false or fake equations and outright lies. But of course you aren't told any of this.

And that brings us to the last fault of the prominent atheists. Atheists like Christopher Hitchens and Penn Jillette and Richard Dawkins and Ricky Gervais always perch assuredly on top of the work of scientists, without knowing anything about that work except its fame. The perfect example of this is the oft-mentioned Stephen Hawking. These atheists rarely ever quote him, since he is mostly unquotable; they simply point to him as an ally, an ally no one (they think) can contradict, since no one can understand him. He seems like a firm footing because he is universally thought to be smart. But I would be willing to bet that few of these atheists have read Hawking, and that none of them have read beyond his coffee-table books or can explain his theories sensibly (or even insensibly, as he does). Like most modern pseudo-intellectuals on both sides of every fence, they know nothing concrete about Relativity, QED, quarks, string theory or anything else, but this does not stop them from name dropping and using these theories as ballast. They can't have read Hawking closely, even beyond the equations, because they seem unaware that he has distanced himself from atheism. Few of the great scientists or mathematicians that atheists perch upon were actually atheists. Newton was not an atheist, nor were Kepler or Euler or even Laplace. As I showed above, Hitchens perches heavily upon Laplace, even quoting him. But it turns out that Laplace cannot be confirmed to have said this at all. The quote Hitchens uses can be traced only back to E. T. Bell in 1937, who provided no source.* The famous scientists were most often real scientists (until recently), which means they could probably see that atheism was not a scientific stance.

In summation, the scientists should stick to science and the critics should stick to what they know: politics and pop culture. Richard Dawkins, for instance, has more than enough to do in filling the holes of evolution. He does not need to waste time debating charlatans and mental midgets in Kansas and Montana. The young-Earth creationist view that he has spent so much time ridiculing was not making any headway before he came along, and if it is now finding a small foothold in the small towns, it may be because he has helped publicize it. As for the atheists of all sorts and levels, scientist and layman, they should apply the same standards they apply to creationists to themselves. They should be entirely more parsimonious in their use of the words "knowledge" and "certainty". They should recognize that their elevation above the ignorant masses is not nearly as great as they imagine, since their theories are slender reeds, not marble columns. Finally, they should recognize that atheism is a belief just as firmly planted in irrationality, in ego and desire, as theism. Atheism has no proof and no possible proof. It is

unscientific. Like all human beliefs, it is a hunch based on a tissue, a guess based on a smear, a conjecture based on a passing mist.

*<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/johnson/551>. It required the help of one of Hitchens' new allies at the neoconservative *Commentary* magazine, Daniel Johnson, to bring this to our attention.

FUTURISM & STUCKISM

by Miles Mathis



Here's a piece of very bald propaganda from the BBC, dated February 20, 2009. In an article entitled "Back to the Futurists",¹ the arts correspondent Laurence Pollard tries to tie the Stuckists to the Futurists. The first sentence of the article is

It {Futurism} called for the demolition of museums and libraries, contempt for women and the glorification of war, "the world's only hygiene".

That sentence is bolded in the article. We are not in the presence of a subtle propagandist here. He makes no attempt to hide his method or cloak the psychology. He assumes his reader is naïve. He assumes that this reader can be made to mistrust or disdain all art movements by leading with an art movement that condemns women and glorifies war. Very soon after this, he tells us that Futurism paved the way for "more recent cultural agitators like the Stuckists."

The naïve reader is expected to make the jump here: the Futurists were shallow agitators with horrible aims, so the Stuckists probably are, too.

The primary problem with all this is that it turns the truth on its head. It turns art history on its head. In the current squabble, it is not the Stuckists who are the children of the Futurists, it is the post-postmodernists (or whatever they are calling themselves this week). The exhibitors, judges, curators, critics, and other promoters of the Turner Prize are direct descendants of Futurism, as are all the artists promoted by top galleries like Saatchi, Gagosian, Pace-Wildenstein, etc.

The secondary problem is that Pollard knows this. If he is writing as an arts correspondent for the BBC, he must know enough recent art history to know the lines of descent in the 20th century. The avant garde has dumped the anti-feminist pro-war parts of Futurism, but the anti-art, anti-museum, anti-high-culture part of the Futurist manifesto is the central pillar of contemporary art. That is why the Turner Prize artists and jurors are all still trying to find the least artistic thing they can to put in the museum. This undercuts the museum, the art, the artist, and the culture of beauty and elevation all at the same time. It undercuts “the aristocracy”, if the aristocracy is understood to be rich people trying to buy beautiful things. The current attitude toward art history is precisely what the Futurist attitude toward art history was in 1909: a broad and crushing contempt. Current artists and critics can misrepresent, slander, and vilify art history because it means absolutely nothing to them. It is something to be knocked down, and only that.

Conversely, the Stuckists are defenders of the old, pre-Futurist, art. They are not defenders of aristocracy, by any definition, but they are defenders of painting, sculpture, drawing, representation, and figuration. They have attacked Duchamp by name, and Duchamp is famous, if not as a Futurist, then as a Dadaist. A Dadaist is just a subtle variation of a Futurist. A Dadaist may not be pro-war or anti-woman, but a Dadaist was and is at least as anti-art and anti-museum as a Futurist. Duchamp put a urinal in a museum show in 1917, and he did it, by his own admission, to undercut the whole idea of putting beautiful things in beautiful buildings. The Turner Prize is built around this idea. The Turner Prize IS Futurism and Dadaism in the 21st century.

So when the Stuckists march outside the Tate Britain with their signs, they are marching against Futurism, not for it. It is the artists and their promoters inside the building who are the descendants of Futurism. It is the artists exhibiting rooms of blinking lights and tinkertoys and cans of excrement that are the Futurists of the moment, unctuously trying to sell us anti-art as some form of squishy and undefined progressivism. It is these artists, hiding behind politics and theory, who are continuing to destroy an entire field of enterprise. They claim that this destruction is a sort of ongoing Bastille Day, by which aristocracy is defeated once again by egalité, but the truth is much darker—this truth being that contemporary art is nothing more than self-promotion by the vulgar and talentless, and market promotion by those with no scruples and no shame.

More than that, the contemporary art market is a government subsidized racket, underwritten undemocratically by tax dollars and perpetuated by state-sponsored propaganda. This article by Mr. Pollard is just one sample among many decades of bald, transparent, and hamhanded agitprop. Notice that Mr. Pollard is not writing as a representative of a gallery or any other private interest. No, he is writing as a BBC correspondent. The BBC is state-sponsored, which makes his article state-sponsored propaganda for a private market. He has turned the truth on its head for some hidden interest, probably a gallery. With some digging, we could probably find a Saatchi or Serota behind this article.

Postscript: on May 5, 2009, I filed a formal complaint with the BBC, including this article as my

argument. The BBC is not authorized to tell lies or to rewrite art history. They are forbidden from it, in fact, in their charter. A news agency willfully spreading false information is not only beneath contempt, it is breaking the law.

Furthermore, after getting nothing back from the BBC but a form letter stating that the author had been apprised of my complaint, in July 2009 I contacted a member of Parliament, representing West London, making the same complaint to him. I then wrote up this petition, which I intend to present to both houses of Parliament, asking for an investigation of the arts section of the BBC, and improper influence there. If you are a citizen of the UK and would like to sign this petition, so that I can present it, please contact me immediately.

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled:

The Humble Petition of _____, sheweth that the Arts Section of the BBC has abused its chartered powers in publishing false information, known by the authors and publishers to be false, on multiple occasions. On one recent occasion, as example, the author Laurence Pollard published on February 20, 2009, an article of the title "Back to the Futurists," in which he claimed that a group opposing the Turner Prize was connected historically to the Futurists. This author should know and is assumed to know that this is false. The editors of the arts section at the BBC should also know this is false, since the Futurists are among the most famous groups of 20th century artists. It is historical fact, commonly known, that the Turner Prize itself is descended from Futurism, in direct line. So that this article is turning the truth on its head in order to promote a hidden agenda. That agenda is the covert promotion of current private interests in the art market. In other words, such articles are a strong indication that private interests have bought influence in the arts section of the BBC, through corrupt authors like this, in order to purposely misinform the public about art and art history. You can read more about this particular article here:

<http://mileswmathis.com/bbc.html>

Other investigation of arts section corruption at the BBC has been done by David Lee, whose work can be found here,

<http://thejackdaw.co.uk>

Wherefore your Petitioner prays that your honourable House does open an investigation of the arts section of the BBC, and improper influence there. This Petitioner reminds the House that the Turner Prize and those who promote it have already been found by the government to be engaging in unethical practices. In July of 2006 the Charity Commission found that Nicolas Serota and others connected to the Turner Prize had broken Charity Law by buying works (with public funds) from their own trustees. Mr. Serota came near to losing his job over this, as you will remember, and many were surprised to find

no one indicted for breaking criminal law in this scandal.

This Petitioner suspects it would be quite easy to show that the BBC arts section has been infiltrated by private interests, and that authors such as Laurence Pollard are being prompted and paid by promoters of the Turner Prize and/or by private London galleries such as Saatchi. This is of public concern and the concern of Parliament for many reasons, not the least of which is that it is contrary to the charter of the BBC to be publishing false information, especially false information to benefit a private interest.

A British friend, after reading this, feared I might be opening myself up to a libel suit by the BBC, Pollard, or Saatchi, for going public with such an accusation. This was my email reply to him:

Dear _____

Petitioning is not "going public", is it? As I understand it, a petition is put in a bag on the back of a chair, not sent directly to the Sunday Times. I suspect there is something to prevent libel lawsuits against petitioners, otherwise no citizen could ever request an investigation of anything without fear of lawsuit. Direct representation would be out the window immediately, as would the last vestige of democracy or whatever it is we are supposed to have in the US and UK. This petition is a request for investigation of fact, not a statement of fact. I am certain that no one has been sued for sending his representative a letter in the US, complaining of someone's malfeasance, even in the case that complaint is false. Such correspondence may even be privileged. As I said, I suspect that petitioning is privileged like that. You should be able to complain of anything to your representative, even if it turns out to be unfounded. In such a case, you are not required to prove your suspicion. It is the asked-for investigation that will prove or disprove your suspicion.

Beyond that, you can't really believe this article I reference is just an accident or mistake. This author is the one opening himself to libel, not me, since he is slandering the Stuckists with false information. I would love to go to court to prove his reading of history is false, since that would be fantastically easy to do. Why should he be able to make a scurrilous claim like this with no proof, and against all historical fact? Is libel protected so long as it is under a major masthead and couched in cloudy language? Is libel protected speech, as long as one can write it off as innuendo? As for my claim that he was hired or prompted by the art market, that would be harder to prove, yes, which is why I am asking Parliament to do an investigation. If I could prove it now, I wouldn't need the help of Parliament or anyone else. That is also why I use words like "suspect." I "suspect" an investigation would turn up improprieties, and that is what I say. In the US, opinion and suspicion is protected speech. I am free to suspect anything I like, and I think you are, too, in the UK.

There are undoubtedly bigger crimes being done by the art market, and by writers at the BBC. This is just one instance of a false article being published, known by both writer and publisher to be false. And here is zero chance that either House will act on my petition. But I am going forward with it, one way or the other. It may be the first in a line of petitions I make to Parliament. It is my first volley in a long

battle, my first shout out to UK legislators. But it may be that it will prompt someone somewhere to do something they weren't going to do, to look at something they hadn't looked at before, to see a connection they hadn't seen before. Ten years down the line, with a bag full of similar petitions from me, Parliament may decide to act on some issue more important than this one, but related. In that case, the argument I am building now will not have been in vain.

Postscript number 2: After returning today (July 29, 2009) to the BBC article in question, I realized it had been changed since I filed my complaint with the BBC. The author has watered the article down, and added positive nods to the Stuckists, perhaps in answer to my paper. But this only makes the article contradictory, confused, and pointless. For example, the opening bolded sentence has not changed, and this sentence is a clear indictment of the Futurists. But the final sentence is now, "But the manifestoes were great." What? Contempt for women and the glorification of war is great? The author's final paragraphs no longer support his opening thesis. Why? Because he is now trying to make it look like he is not belittling all manifestoes. He has also added an audio link to Charles Thomson reading the Stuckist Manifesto and a picture of one of Thomson's paintings. So the article is nothing but a garbled mess now, with no thesis and no point, and Pollard apparently changed it to cover his tracks. He got caught by me and decided to hide behind this revision. I will be able to prove that in greater detail once this article goes into the archives (the Wayback Machine), but it is too soon for that. They don't archive until at least six months have passed. I will get back to you. I should have taken a screenshot, but I didn't think of it. If anyone out there has a screenshot of that BBC article from February, let me know.

¹<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/7894877.stm>

Of Beavers and other Beasties

by Miles Mathis



The odd occasion of this particular missive to myself befell my eyes as I cycled home today, smilingly as ever (as most will be shocked to hear), pensively peddling my belled and basketed bike through the raucous sidestreets of Taos, returning from some terribly interesting rendezvous which will remain secret. As I traversed a relatively less-raucous stretch near the high-school playing fields, a stretch which cut in half a wide swath of encroaching desert, I looked about me to see how my friends the prairie dogs were doing on this fine late-summer day. Several fat specimens of this little sun-bleached beaver squeaked at me and hurled themselves at their holes, forgetting for the nonce I was an eternal ally.

No doubt they found something offensive about the rolling reflectors on my wheels, as their larger and more ferocious non-cousins—the real dogs—also did (which real dogs, seemingly free to roam all streets in Taos, possibly as a warning to possums, always misread the signs of bell and basket, taking me for some sort of guileless gull, tasty of ankle: blind were they to the heavy stick in my basket, which I enjoy bringing down upon their fanged heads as much as they enjoy raising those fangs to my delectation). Be that as it may, it occurred to me to wonder what sustenance these fellow furry creatures of mine, these burrowing tawny beavers, could obtain in that blasted plain, where nothing could be spied (at least by me) but yellow dirt. Not a bush nor a weed, neither sage nor stunted mesquite nor prickled dandelion, and therefore also no grasshopper nor cricket nor other beetle to munch thereon.

My mind as sharp as usual, I quickly espied the answer: these clever beasts were sucking the dregs and lees from the bottles and cans lying about in spectacular numbers, gifts thrown by an admiring and

charitable street audience, passing at all hours in their hurtling automobiles. No wonder the golden furies were fat: who would not get round and flush living on nothing but beer and soda pop and the occasional remnant of a KitKat bar? Oh, the high life! Oh, the *bon-vivant* ease of a snug hole and a firmly established welfare!

These successful ponderings could not help but lead to others, and I looked to the charitable audience aforesaid, even then passing in a rumbling cloud of diesel and ash, adding a touch of goodwill to the field of prairie dogs with a donation of near-empty Budweiser bottles, complete with carrying case. I was gratified to think the beaveritos need not strain themselves carrying each bottle down the hole separately! [A thought: those subterranean abodes of the beaveritos must be simply stiff with recyclables. I will suggest at council that some kind person pitch a large plastic recycling bin or two out the window in this region next time they think of it. I am sure the little people underneath are as environmentally conscious as the rest of us.] Looking at this giving and full-hearted audience driving by, I say, for a moment I could not fathom how they could afford the Cyclopean 4x4's and Whale-sized dualies, the eight and ten-cylinder, fuel-injecting, fuel-imbibing, fuel-expectorating Leviathans and Molochs that lumbered by me all the live-long (glorious) day, sounding like Satan himself removing a lodged pit from his gullet. [A memory: It seems like only yesterday that I could tell the difference when I was about to be passed by a dumptruck, filled with the waste of hundreds, or a bus, carrying many dozens of heavy children, muling and puking, or a vehicle containing only a single person and hauling nought. Today, the difference cannot be told: all are required by law, apparently, to sonic equivalence (perhaps for the benefit of the elderly crossing the street, who do not want the inconvenience of adjusting their hearing aids—and for whom, admittedly, small quiet cars were a unconscionable danger)]. But how do the generous and altruistic masses, so thoughtful toward the beaverish as to all creatures above and below, how do they afford such sonic equivalence, however beneficial it may be to the old and deaf? More than this, how can they afford the gas to achieve it? Can they have really become that profligate with their charity, that they will spend half of every paycheck to announce their coming to the hard-of-hearing, to prevent unnecessary accident (perhaps, it now occurs to me, they may also think to benefit the birds, mice, rabbits, and various and pied ungulates, all potential roadkill, who now can hear them coming from acres away, even with no touch of brake or illegal use of horn).

While it is certainly not fantastic that my four-wheeled brothers may indeed have become just this spiritually wide and grand (after all, many of them have read Ken Wilbur) I think it is more likely that there is some new tax write-off that will explain it. Our government has never expected all people to reach such heights of self-sacrifice, and it has always known that it is its solemn and eternal duty to encourage them, particularly through the tax laws. The IRS has ever been our friend in this matter, led wisely by a dutiful and ever-scrupled Congress, with foresight for all generations of hard-of-hearing to come. Being an economic babe and terribly negligent reader of the newspapers, I must have overlooked the new encouragements to such sacrifice and other-feeling.

These poor auto owners of Taos, who, we are told, are among the least fortunate in the State and Union, cash-wise, cannot be purchasing these giant—though safe and magnanimous—trucks, vans, SUVs, and

hummers on credit. An hourly wage at WalMart or Applebee's cannot pay back a \$40,000 loan, short of grand theft, employer blackmail, or phonesex on the side, and surely the banks know this. No, it must be a business expense, allowed and encouraged by all governmental agencies and NGO's from top to bottom, which explains the magnificent and principled use of such large engines, tires, multiple exhaust pipes and shiny tangled aft-machinery, and high-octane fuel, all for the good of the elderly, the aurally handicapped, and all wild and domestic things that are foolish enough to attempt locomotion without a large vehicle surrounding them.

In fact, I imagine that many studies were done, with all necessary vigor and rigor, proving this was the most efficient and thoughtful manner of solution. Easier by far to refit the cars than the non-cars, since the former category is so much larger. After all, we could hardly afford to equip every cow and chicken, every old man walking to the cigar shop, every runaway child or hamster, with a rollbar, airbag and 360-degree bumper. Infinitely better and wiser to mandate, legislate, and fiscally underwrite sonic equivalence; and since there is no silencing of a dumptruck or freight train, well, our answer is obvious. After all, the real danger is these stealth-cars, bell-less bicycles, and other death machines that can pass the house or the shop without our knowing of it.

These two problems solved at last, I decided to look at the third and thorniest, even as I passed the last stretch of road nearing my own adobe (a local anagram for abode, I am told). With the wind still in my hair, and my hair still on my head in this decade before dotage, I thought it was time to solve a problem that had knuckled me for years. That being, where do the intelligent now take sustenance? I had found that the prairie dogs, living in a field of seeming waste and dearth, had yet become fattened to a glorious degree on drive-by charity. These varminticules, though not the least brainy of all creatures, were not the most brainy either, and yet the subtle lord (or alien overlord—we are writing from Taos, I repeat) had given them their daily rusk, or six-pack of Schlitz empties, as the case may be, just as with the "fouls of the air" and other Biblical fauna. Might not the same be said of those claiming to be, or actually being, the most brainy? Might there be some secret source of fiber and calories, some manna arriving in mysterious manner from the heavens, or from a passing manned contraption, the being inside unaware or even contemptuous of the crumbs he was strewing?

I have often thought that our field of yellow dirt is now emptier than at any time in the long history of human desertification called civilization. Old T.S. could not have imagined such a Wasteland. Carlyle, prescient sage that he was, wasn't even close. Nietzsche, he might have imagined it, pretty near, but he never could have fathomed living through it. What were the Germans of his time compared to the Beavers and Cleavers of ours? Living amongst such lifeless growths as the Turner Prize, the Museum of Modern Art, or just about any random second of TV, radio, internet, or other media source, the yellow dirt is now so devoid of nourishing bug or beetle it might be nuked nightly with no discernible effect. The fears for an atomic exchange have been nullified by zombifying everyone before the fact, like an inoculation. America has cleverly avoided the possibility of a loss of art in wartime, as in Dresden or Baghdad or Hiroshima, by not producing any. In such a situation, insurance is a superfluity. If America weren't holding a number of Old Master works, it could suffer the next deluge with no loss

or claim. Decades have gone by with nothing for the Muses to drag from the flotsam. Future centuries will look back on the 20th century like we look back on the 9th, John Scotus alone on a curragh in a dark empty ocean. Carlyle said of America in 1850 that it was, “eighteen millions of the greatest bores the world had ever seen before” and it is doubtful we can get on top of him by making that 300 millions instead. Nor has England or Europe kept any of his aristocracy, by birth, worth, or otherwise. They have followed the American scheme into spiritual and aesthetic nullity, a commonwealth or union of phantasms, of vultures great and vultures small, where even Oxford dons sell cans of excrement and Cambridge feeds MI6. Even Carlyle’s “beaver”—the honest tradesman—is a rarity, now obsolescent. He cannot compete.

This admitted, the manna somehow remains. We brainiest of prairie dogs keep dragging the unbroken bottles below and straw out the last drops of liquid clinging to the sides. We lick the foil wrappers for chocolate knowledge, and somehow do not perish for years (until we droop or drop from drunkenness or vitamin deficiency). We may not be nourished into a state of great effort or effect, but we can still look sleek at times, standing outside the hole on a sunny day, squeaking at intruders.

What is this manna? It is the past. It is the past that we are taking the last sugar from, the last hoppy crusting. The writers and artists of the past tossed their dear garbage out the window, often in a thoughtless drive-by (though sometimes as a purposeful gift), and we are attempting to recycle it for them, via our empty bellies.

Woe to us and to them, the job we are doing. The ground has been poisoned by too many developers trying to drive us into even less valuable lands, and our feet sting and bleed. The crows worry us constantly, in ever greater black bands, and of course we lose a tithe or more to the street itself, not looking as we scramble. Our only solace is underground, where we can huddle and nuzzle and listen to the roarings and coshings overhead, sucking the last moisture from the occasional can of Falstaff or Colt45 or MountainDew.

Yes, the true artist of any sort has become like the whooping crane or mountain gorilla—a few dozen lonely individuals lost in the clouds or the bush, rearing their rarest offspring, hoping to be spared for one more generation. Blake asked, “Doth the eagle know what is in the pit? Or wilt thou go ask the mole?” And we now have an answer for him, since the eagle has retreated to the pit for shelter. The mole, snuffling and blind, has inherited the world, and has left his hole to the eagle.

Near the end of the 19th century, Hardy said of his hero Clym, “He seemed to look upon a certain mass of disappointment as the natural preface to all realizations.” Hardy and Carlyle and Nietzsche and Tolstoy and the rest are now considered pessimists, but think you how joyous and gay they would have been on every living day had they known, *fully* known, exactly what they had the fortune to predate? Hardy’s character sees hardship as a preface to what?—*realizations*. Realizations! Hardy and Carlyle and Ruskin and all the rest could gritch and grouch, but they were *published*. In their time the eagle still had a claw in the media. Where is the journal now that would publish them, or any eagle? Stuff and

nonsense, it doesn't exist. The blind moles have inherited the press from top to bottom. The eagle can self-publish on the internet—a pit that—hardly a realization. More a virtualization. Soon the mole will have that, too, and the final margin will be lopped.

Do I bid you clip your wings and huddle closer? No. Do I bid you look on the bright side, and think how much worse it may be after you are dead? No. Do I bid you into any false happiness or depression, some resignation East or West, black or white, God or Devil? No. I bid you leap from your burrow and tear the skies with an aquiline shriek, tossing your beautiful garbage willy-nilly to the winds. If it falls on no publishers' or galleries' heads, let them live manna-less, as they should. The seeds of art, like prairie dogs and eagles and even glass bottles, have a strange way of persisting, even in the most inhospitable climes. You will look across the desert and not understand its life, but it lives nonetheless. Just where you will gaze in greatest dejection and hopelessness, most fearing the pit, the empty, lifeless, end of all things, even there the fat beaverito will raise his silly head from his sandy hole and squeak at you for your impertinence.

It is not yours to publish and gallerize, to consign and conscript, to worry and maunder. It is yours to *do*, in as perfect and imperishable form as possible. The Muses will see to it that that which should not perish does not. You are just a pawn, and will be moved about with a plan, you can be sure, though you won't be able to keep pace with the often invisible Queen. Nor has she time to pepper you with a constant line of patter or encouragement. To every *duh* and *buh* she will have no answer, expecting you to keep moving on the last order. If you don't leap over castles in great els or zip across the entire board at an angle, don't thereby throw a fit and refuse to budge. Such pieces really are thrown from the field as a nuisance, or snatched by the great hand.

It did not hurt Vincent that he failed to impress the current publisher and gallerite, that his checkbook was not balanced or balanceable, that his bed was rumpled, his pants and shoes unstylish, his love-life unfilmable, his name unknown to the papers, unpronounceable by the loselry in America. His order from the Queen was *do*, and he did. Even with an ear and half he heard better than anyone else with two ears. He went *exactly* where he was supposed to go, and when he was supposed to go. Not every appointed move is pretty or pleasant: this we would know even without any known religion or text.

And now, Vincent's worth is in what he did, not in what some fool paid for it. Had none of his paintings ever made it to auction or museum or book, had they all remained in a hundred poor man's lofts, looked at only by the children and upstairs maids, his worth would be none the less; nay, it would be *greater*. Since in that case he would have avoided the analysis of a million morons, the bad reproductions on a billion coffeecups and billboards, selling a trillion useless and shoddy products. In the lofts he might hope to have touched truly a few in a quiet place.

Yea, if you bless me with anything, ye unknowable powers, let it be avoidance of such watered down vulgarity, of death by over-familiarity. It may seem like a piece of fantasy or wild optimism to refuse it now, as things stand, but grant me the artistic boon that my work never hop across the screensaver as

the token and bought logo of some future Bill Gates, some future beaverish bozo. I burn that bridge also before I come near to it: I advertise no rich man or woman, with image or word, and if any think to do it, remember from this very sentence that I damn you to your face, you future clueless and faithless Leviathan! If my work should stand at the top of your page (in any way) let it stand as a curse upon you and your empty enterprise! May your business fail in spectacular fashion, and may the worthies of the day (if there be any such) mock you in extravagant and public display. It will not be slander, since I here confirm it as true, with my very lips. You, Sir, are an outlandish fool: you know nothing of art, and deserve nothing of art. I and all true artists shun you and cast you out. Begone! and return to your pathetic dungeons and coinage. Use Pino for your PR if you will, or the Devil. You can probably get the Devil for cheaper.

But enough of devils and dunces. I speak to my own choir and no other. Yea, Candelled Choristers, Eagle-robed in blue, laugh as you cleave the clouds on your great wings, for the pinions were grown by your own body, and cannot be taken from you until you are caught at last: and even then they are yours. So are the works that you scatter to the four winds and to the keeping of Aurora. Laugh, for you created them and no one else. They can be stolen or destroyed, but only you could create them, come what may. They can be destroyed, but the fact that you created them cannot be destroyed. The action is not undone by its ending. A thing that has happened, will have happened forever. It is a fact for all time. Though no trace of it remain, no record of it be made, it *did* happen. This is but logic; it takes no faith or religion. “It happened” is a true sentence, and cannot be made untrue by any dervish or devil, by any philosophy or theology. What care you if future fatheads know your every schedule?—your life will have been lived whether they have it on authority or not, whether it is writ down in proper language or not. At the worst, even a bungling future Bill Gates, falsifying your every word and deed and image, cannot change “It happened.” The past cannot be altered. Only the present view of the past can be altered, as in Orwell. Big Brother can tell us that Leonardo was an ugly dwarf who molested baby elephants and painted with pig’s blood, but that cannot affect Leonardo, it can only affect us. The past has the distinction of being utterly untouchable. The *record* of the past can be touched—is as grubby as anything touched by man—but the record of the past is not the past. Absolutely nothing about the past can be changed, hence regret, but also hence my point.

This must be as satisfying as anything, excepting possibly the indestructibility of matter. Come what may, we are free of those two sins at least: we cannot destroy matter or the past. Many scrupulous individuals have breathed a sigh of relief upon recognizing the former fact; they must also recognize the latter. Take heart, your potential extent of error is somewhat less than you thought. Nor can your enemy err as extravagantly as you give him credit for. Your work, for good or ill, is permanent. If ill, you can erect the grandest monument in praise of yourself, it will not matter: the act was done and cannot be undone by talk or letter. If good, your enemies can slander you in all countries and languages, it will not matter: the work itself stands untouchable. “It happened,” and no amount of slander can un-happen it.

And this is why your laughter is neither delusion nor resignation, illogic nor insanity. Like a berserker

you can race onto any field, even the field of death, with a whoop and a grin. Every day is a good day to die; which means, likewise, that any day is a good day to live. A day that is not worth dying on is a sacrilegious day, hardly worth getting out of bed for.

As an example, some will have tripped over my first sentence in this missive to myself, where I peddled “smilingly” and then “pensively.” What, *both*? they will ask, doubting my full command of the language. Yes, you can smile while thinking, as I think I have proved in the sentences between that one and this one. Pessimism is not the necessary outcome of all thought, no matter how deep or consistent. Nor is every complainer or hater a pessimist. The greatest haters and complainers are the greatest optimists, since only someone who saw some hope of, or road to, improvement would bother complaining. Those who think everything is awful and always will be do not waste effort complaining or hating: what would be the point? You hate because you love. You hate those things that threaten those things you love, precisely.

In the same way, anger and desire are most needful, and to be accepted with a laugh and whoop. No prayer for release from these things has ever been heard, or shall be. Only the prayer, “thank you, Great Unknowable, for my desire and anger and hatred and complaining and dissatisfaction and incompleteness and grumpiness and lust and hunger and earmites and so on. Without them I wouldn’t ever wake from my stupid dreams: might as well be a phantasm already, wasting the Unknowable’s time with a constant cuddle.” The Great Unknowable, like any other boyfriend or girlfriend, can’t be jerking you off all the time, playing with your hair and quelling your thumb-sucking fears. The GU has some right to expect some work from you, in return for such things.

Desire and anger and all the rest did not arise by some genetic accident or mistake, by some Luciferian secret tweek at the end of creation, like a piss in the pie. Since you don’t know what the fuck is going on 99.9% of the time, it is best to assume that those who made you do know what is going on, whether you call them Nature, or God, or the Mitochondrian tinies, or the Medi-chlorian ghosties, or the Comrades from Rigel or Aldebaran. If one of your arms were totally useless, you can be sure it would drop off of its own accord; likewise, if desire were such a hindrance to you, it would evaporate in short order, with no airy prayers from your lips. So the logical thing to do, once your IQ reaches the point you think it already is, is to begin listening to your desire and anger and so on, as the subtle Muses they are. If they do not always ask you gaze at your navel or eat sugared almonds, maybe it is not their fault but yours, for expecting such asinine tasks. You can be sure that you will not be asked to stand on one foot for long spells or pull towels through your bowels or say the same word over and over till you fall asleep: these requests only come from accidentally tuning into the idiot channel. But your Muses may set you some difficult tasks, to be sure, tasks which, like Vincent’s, don’t always allow you a shave and \$40 haircut before setting out.

In fact, that is a lovely test, for those who still hear occasional static from the idiot channel (as we all do—it is a powerful station, pumping out the wattage from all times and places in the past): can you see anyone admirable actually doing the things you think to do? Vincent did some strange things, but I

don't remember him ever doing anything in letter or spirit like standing on one foot or tying himself in knots or suchlike. Nor did he ever flee his desire or anger or any emotion. In a calmer way, and as a completely different example, neither did Goethe. Can you see Goethe saying *Om* for an hour, hoping to see God, or sitting on a pillar in a diaper, looking holy for it? These are signs of spiritual desperation, not far different from popping strange pills or trying to buy redemption through penance or indulgence. The fact that they are Eastern instead of Western means nothing. A fool is a fool, in Calcutta as well as Calgary, and no amount of new words and poses is going to change that.

Sloth, like anger and desire, may possibly be a positive message from the Muses at times, but it may also be a sign of deafness and waywardness in regard to the Muses. Which is to suggest that those who spend hours and much money lying on bamboo mats listening to their breathing and their shakras and whatnot, may simply prefer that exertion to the exertion of actually doing something. It is far easier to count breaths and heartbeats, and self-massage your pressure points, fore and aft, than it is to learn to paint or sculpt or play the piano or guitar or sitar. Or to learn to read and write, or to learn just about anything. It is easier to listen to someone tell you find your center and be your ancient self, than it is to listen to the Muses tell you to get off your fat ass and work hard. The Muses have never told me to be centered or stay on my center or any of that chaff: they always tell me to dare to get off the center, to fly out into the void, off-balance as much as possible. Useful Muses don't send you to bed, they let you sleep your fill and then they spin you out into the realms of chaos, testing you to see what you can handle. You already know your center, you have been sleeping on it and in it for only they know how long: your job is to explore the non-center, to increase your boundaries: first to crawl, and then to walk, and then to dance the widest possible worlds. This is not done by crawling endlessly about the center, *Oming* and drooling in a faded diaper. It is done by daring what you did not dare yesterday. By going where you did not go yesterday, by questioning what you did not question yesterday, by getting louder, bigger, taller, more graceful in every movement, on balance or off. The Muse's job is not to herd you always toward the center, like a naughty child in pre-school; her job is to throw you continually into deeper water, until, at last, all water is your center, and all land and air. You will not need to return to your little bed at night, since everywhere will be your bed and comfort.

So suck the subtle dregs from the faded bottles at your feet, and, like the wisest prairie dog, leap across the yellow dirt at top speed with a happy squeak, mindless of the circling crows and vultures, the giant knobby wheels that mean to crush you, by accident or purpose. Leap and prance, and call yourself an eagle, and your prancing flight, for your joy will only increase with your radius from the hole. Your feet will seem lighter, your fur glossier, your nose wetter, your very yelp more melodious, for the exercise. And when the shadow stoops, at last, bite it with a gleeful viciousness, for the crow and vulture are cowards. Your teeth are not just bottle openers.

Summer Sun



oil

48 x 28 in., 122 x 71 cm.

Blue Blanket



**oil on wood
40 x 21 in. 102 x 53 cm.**

Blue Couch



pastel
13 x 20 in.

A REVIEW OF BO BARTLETT AT FORUM GALLERY

by Miles Mathis



Unlike mainstream critics such as Peter Schjeldahl or Arthur Danto, who appear to intend to write uninteresting things that are also false, or Dave Hickey, who appears to intend to write false things that are occasionally interesting, I intend to write things that are both interesting and true. I am seeking those true statements that tend to go under cover in a milieu such as ours, getting lost in the noise and bustle of a modern existence, and when I do find them they seem to jump as from nowhere, like a grasshopper behind a leaf. So if I tell you something you weren't prepared to hear, it is not by accident. What you are least prepared to hear is often what you most need to hear.

That said, I will begin this critique with praise. Like Graydon Parrish and Jeremy Lipking and Yuqi Wang and a few other realists, Bo Bartlett has always impressed me as an earnest artist, with talent, imagination, and a great deal of potential. I don't know Bo, but from reading his website he seems intelligent, well-read, and genuine. Beyond that, I have seen several of his works I really like, and that is rare enough in itself. I have used this piece below the heading of my article on New Realism for years:

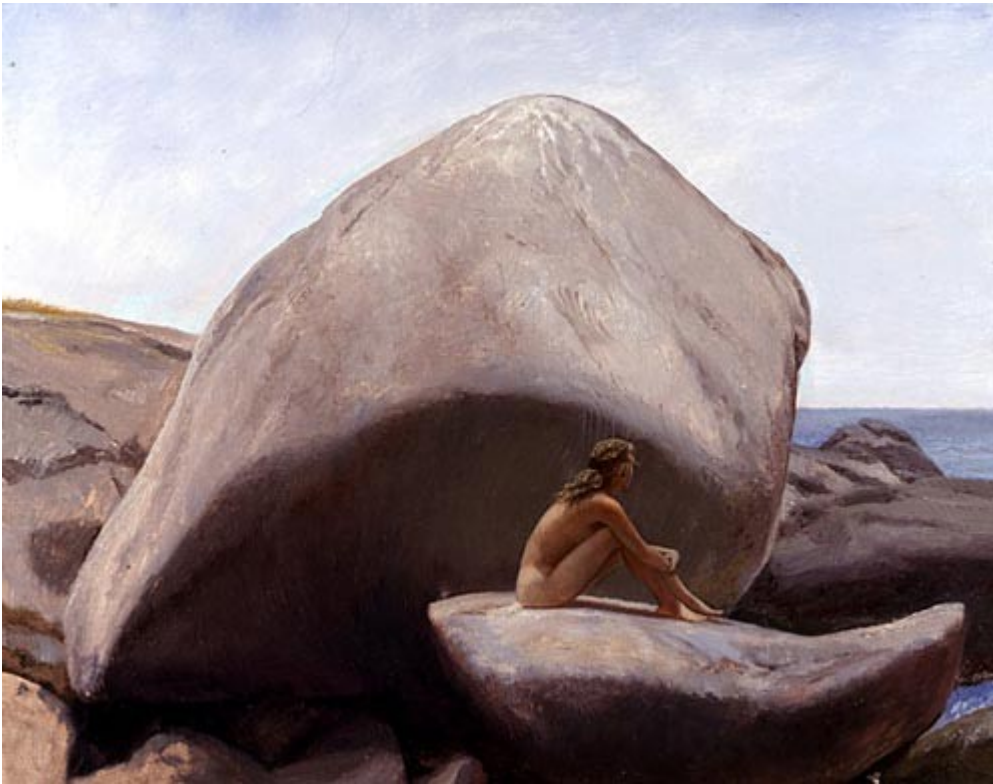


That is a really lovely mood and composition, and the painting stands as an example of that now rarest of adjectives in realism: subtlety.

This is another of my favorites of his:



A good composition, simple but strong. Here's another good idea for a painting, done well:



And this is also a good idea for a painting, although I think it doesn't quite come off.



Take away the guy and the white swimsuit (which looks like underwear) and you would have a mystery that could almost sustain itself, without eliciting a chuckle.

Those are a few older works of Bartlett, but I am writing this paper mainly as a critique of his more

recent work, specifically of his show at Forum Gallery, Los Angeles, in March and April of this year (2009). Again, I will begin with the painting I like [see above, below title]. That's a stunner, just about perfect. Great model, perfect color harmony, strong mood, subtle but deep. The only false note is off the canvas, in the title. "Sweetness" doesn't work, even if the model is his wife, as I suspect. Not that she isn't sweet, but the *mood* of the painting isn't sweet. It may contain a smudge of sweetness, just because she is so beautiful, but the painting goes way beyond sweetness. The title conflicts with the painting, which is the last thing you want. The title doesn't describe the painting, or even suggest it. A title should either be a perfect suggestion of the painting, or it should be an almost invisible tag. It should never compete with the painting, or undercut it. Cutesy titles should be avoided, as should pseudo-intellectual titles. This is how we realists separate ourselves from the phoniness of Modernism. The title here is a bit cutesy, and it is probably a pet name or inside joke. As such, it can only distract from the "iconic" nature of Bartlett's work. Bartlett has stretched the neck (I assume) and simplified all artistic conventions (like color, composition, etc.) in order to give his subject an eternal quality. He has succeeded completely, I would say. All the more reason to look sideways at that title. You do not title an icon "Sweetness."



A similar painting, "Alexis," may be his daughter, since she has mom's eyebrows. I could just look up these things, but I can't be bothered. With icons, relationships are meaningless. What is important is

that this painting doesn't quite hit it like the other one. It is not bad. Nothing is technically wrong here. His beautiful and interesting model is well-painted. But the mood comes off a bit flat. This younger girl doesn't have the interest in her face that the older woman has, or Bartlett hasn't found a way to bring it out fully. She needs a more expressive light and pose. The light in "Sweetness" is more raking and one-sided, giving us more mystery. The full warm light in "Alexis" works to bring attention to the cleavage, which is admittedly nice; but, as a matter of art, our eyes should be on her face. The eyes and mouth set the mood, and if our eyes are wandering, we can't fully read the mood. But the face isn't emitting a coherent mood anyway. We are being blocked by the model. She seems uncomfortable with the decolletage, and she punishes the artist and us by building a wall. Bartlett may be aware of this aloofness, trying to use it to build tension, but I doubt it.



Bartlett has a third face-on portrait in the show, of himself, but I would call it a complete failure. As I read his face, I see a total wall, a full psychological blockade. He is not only *not* expressing anything, he is willfully repelling the eye of the audience and painter (which in this case is himself). He might as well title it "Don't Look at Me!" Beyond that, he has a bad haircut painted badly, two collars that don't go together, one floral shoulder, and one lapelled shoulder. The background is an empty brown, like barren earth. It almost appears that Bartlett is trying to do everything wrong here, on purpose. This painting may be some sort of cry for help, and it should certainly be hung in his psychiatrist's office, as a nest of clues.

Seven of the 19 works in the show are portraits of objects: a scythe, a bucket, a wine bottle, a jar of varnish, a burning broom, a rock, and a set table. These may also be clues left for his psychiatrist: otherwise, they are meaningless to me. I don't know why artists paint these things or why people buy them. Bartlett isn't the only one painting objects like this. Jacob Collins has painted candy wrappers; Claudio Bravo has painted crumpled paper; and many other contemporary realists are doing the same, painting blenders and telephones and cars and fishing rods and subway turnstiles and tubes of paint. They might as well be painting Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans. Usually, it is the horrible search for subject by artists with no imagination. But in the case of Bartlett, it shouldn't be that. Bartlett has so often done better than that. Perhaps it is a quota of small works given him by Forum Gallery to appeal to the less rich. I don't know. But in my opinion the works are throw-aways. He shouldn't waste his time on them, and he certainly shouldn't put them in a major show.



But his large works are also unimpressive here. The worst of the lot, in my opinion, is "A Miraculous Outcome." This is a second form of his older painting "Car Crash," but he didn't bother to correct any of the weaknesses in the sequel: he just added some more weaknesses. Like many modern realist works, it is wooden and manufactured. The idea is poor, the composition is poor, and the paint quality is poor. The cliché title fails to undercut it only because the whole concept is cliché. You see this sort of work over and over in galleries like Forum and John Pence and the other top realist galleries, where any one of a hundred oversold artists are trying to manufacture a paintable event, and failing utterly to do so. The background is empty and boring, the car is too small, the people are cutouts, and the color is off. Just look at their pants and shoes. Even in this small photo, you can tell that everything is wrong. Is

he standing on her toes? Are his pants transparent? Why are his pants the same color as the grass? Wouldn't any other color have been better? What is that shadow under his sleeve and on the back of his shirt? If it looks awkward here at 4 inches you can be sure it looks even more awkward at 90 inches. But even if it were painted perfectly, it would be a stupid idea. Painting can't and shouldn't compete with TV and film in documenting contemporary tragedy. A painting of a car wreck must look pathetic next to live coverage or a cinematic treatment.



"A New Beginning" isn't much better. Clearly an homage to Rockwell, this painting doesn't generate any interest at all. The background is a mess, with the bookshelves off-kilter; the sleeve once again contains strange shadows; and the outfit of the artist is ludicrously outdated, without any apparent reason for being so. The only possible interest is the little girl in the corner, who has a nice mystery in her stare. But the overall effect of the work is equivalent to the effect of the canvas within the canvas: it is a blank.



One of the two sold works, “Empire,” was painted in 2007. But I don't see the appeal. As with “A Miraculous Outcome,” Bartlett appears to be following Nerdrum. “A Miraculous Outcome” was a sort of return to the Bartlett of the 80's, when he was following the younger Nerdrum, seeking “modern” excuses for painting multi-figure works. Likewise, “Empire” follows late Nerdrum into the realm of fake myth and apocalypse. We lack the Nerdrum clouds, drifting lazily by like zeppelins, and we get a mohawk instead of a leather helmet, but the idea is the same: violence, rubble, and the end of days.



The other sold work, “Kingdom of Ends,” is a return to the Bartlett of the 90's, when he went strongly Americana. I read this work as a mild paean to technology or globalism, which must go over like a lead

balloon eight years after 9/11. Either that, or it is intended as a mild rebuke of globalism. In either case, the mildness is a problem; and in any case, the ambiguity is dangerous.

The conservative, Rockwellian, jingoistic faith in the sanctity of the American Dream has been obliterated in the last decade by both political parties and all their operatives in the media, and paintings like this can be read as either hopeless naïvete or purposeful misdirection.



The same can be said of other Bartlett paintings, beginning with “Allegiance.” I find very little irony in Bartlett’s treatment, which must make the painting prone to be read as a 50’s-style piece of bald propaganda, promoting blind allegiance to government. Yes, the child has his eyes closed, but that is entirely too subtle for the current political climate. More important, psychologically, is that we have a beautiful child in bright sun and blue sky, and a title “Allegiance.” This painting could hang in Dick Cheney’s home, with none of the guests aware of the true message. I assume Bartlett is *not* intending to propagandize blind allegiance, but his mild treatment is not appropriate now. It may have been the right flavor for the 90’s, but the world is not what it was then.

An artist is not required to address politics, but if he does, he is required to mirror the gravity of it. Even in the 90's, Bartlett was only putting a toe in where a full dive was required. In his painting, "Old Glory," a young girl is wrapped in the flag. He may point out that the flag is soiled and that the girl is near a cliff, but again, that is entirely too subtle for the subject. It is not *obviously* a cliff, it might just be another of his rocks; and the soiling is subtle enough to be misread as shadow. Which means that this painting is entirely too easy to read as jingoism.



"History Lesson" is also weak. Bartlett can claim it is a lesson in pacifism, but it is not a strong lesson. We already know that a lot of people died in wars. That is the definition of war. Putting some numbers on a blackboard is not going to impress anyone, especially when they are watered down by a pretty Rockwell composition and a giant flag. Bartlett didn't even manage to fit in the Korean War, and his numbers for the other wars are way too low. If we include civilian casualties, for example, the number for Vietnam is closer to six million. And even Wikipedia admits that the total for WW2 is around 60 million. Without talking to Bartlett in person, we don't know what his intention is here. But ambiguity in politics is not a virtue. Subtlety in portraiture is wonderful; in politics, it is deadly.

Bartlett may point out that in his blogs his politics is clear, but it isn't as clear as he imagines there either. After railing against Bush for eight years (rightly) and starting (with his wife) an American

Peace Prize, he said in a squishy message in late 2008 that it was OK to have hope in Obama. It would be OK, except that it required ignoring a mountain of pertinent facts, beginning with [Obama's voting record in the Senate](#), which was 180 degrees away from pacifism. It required ignoring his associates and appointees, who are not doves by any stretch of the imagination. It required ignoring his TV ads, which spoke of terrorism over and over, to plant a false fear just like the Republicans. And it now requires ignoring his record in the first six months, where he has re-started the war in Afghanistan, continued the war in Iraq, and propagandized for war in Iran and Pakistan. He has also failed to demand repeal of the Patriot Acts, he has failed to call for the repeal of the Military Tribunals Act and to re-instate habeas corpus, he has not closed Guantanamo, he has continued to cover up Abu Ghraib, he has increased the power of the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Reserve, and he has continued to use signing statements, despite promising not to. Perhaps worst of all, he has not re-opened the 911 investigation. For these reasons, among many others, I do not go to Bartlett for my politics, neither his paintings nor his blogs.



Bartlett has one nude in this show, "Vashon Academy." It isn't strong. The main head, again face-on, is good, but the rest threatens to dissolve. The background is empty, the clock isn't round, and the legs and seat are nebulous. Beyond that, the composition doesn't work. Why crop it there, except that he doesn't like to paint feet? Are we to accept that the artist in the painting is painting this nude so high and to the side, so that she has to crane her neck between brushstrokes? And is that an attractive pose, regardless, sitting straight up like a pole, with the hands lost in the crotch and the feet dangling like noodles?

Those legs would be asleep in a matter of minutes, and her back, unsupported, would droop in like time. Put that lovely girl in a real pose, and ditch the rest of this fake composition.



Lastly, I will comment on "Commoners," one of Bartlett's signature square works with three figures. Looks like Bo, his wife, and a pretty blonde friend. A trio of musicians is a serviceable idea, and the bell outside is a nice touch, but otherwise this fails to jell. It fails primarily because it is fake. These people don't look like commoners. They look like pretty people pretending to be poor and full of soul. They can't afford a sheet for the mattress or paint for the walls or shoes for their pretty feet, but they can afford an expensive mandolin and a twice daily shower. These hippies or gypsies are entirely too clean. Even their feet are clean, in a poor house that must have dirty floors. Plus, the girls don't appear to be playing. They are pretending to play as they are pretending to be commoners. Also, why is the light falling on the two girls in different ways? The blonde looks a bit hazy all over, and it is because her shadows are two steps lighter than the those of the central figure. Wouldn't it have been better if the two dresses weren't so nearly the same color, and both so near the color of the background? We want the figures to stand out from the background, not dissolve into it. And we want each figure to have its own existence. The shaded off blue of the blonde makes her even hazier. The central model is striking

enough to survive any competition: the artist didn't need to put the blonde behind a dirty glass. Even the feet don't work. Bartlett has four naked feet to paint, which would be heaven for me, but he blows past them like they are legs on the bed. The blonde girl's toes are barely defined: the upper foot almost evaporates. And Sweetness' feet are unconvincing. The hanging foot is too small, and the third toe on each foot is slightly deformed. She may actually have toes like that, but a fix was in order. An icon—even a commoner icon—with curly toes is a distraction. Plus, well, you know, “commoners” don't exist any more. The word is outmoded. This doesn't look like a period piece (those aren't period clothes), but “commoners” is a period word.

I don't comprehend this entire show, or the intention of Bartlett, or the intention of Forum Gallery. Forum would appear desperate for a successful show, since Bartlett is not one of their “in house” artists. He was not on their list before the show and is not now. Except for Nerdrum, they don't have what one would call a strong slate of realists, by any criteria. I don't like Nerdrum, but I can admit he has some strong points. As for the rest, I don't see it.

So they bring in Bartlett, drastically raise his prices in the middle of a depression, and sell only two works. No doubt they blame him entirely, but most of the blame is on them. They should have seen that this collection of works couldn't bear a large price bump. Only a couple of them were painted recently, the rest being unsold by PPOW. Forum even stooped to misdating several of them, although the real dates are listed on Bartlett's personal site. Forum should have given him more time or been satisfied with a smaller show at lower prices. But the real test is “Sweetness”. Since that painting—which is perfect—didn't sell, we may assume that the fault was with the gallery. It wasn't Bartlett's fault that didn't sell. If a gallery can't sell a work like “Sweetness”, even with a bad title, it can't really justify its existence, in my opinion.

Beyond that, the clientele for these realist galleries is a nuisance to art history. They won't buy a work like “Sweetness” because it is a portrait, but they will buy terrible manufactured scenes of tragedy and banality, for reasons beyond artistic comprehension. Look at this painting by another of Forum's artists, Paul Fenniak:



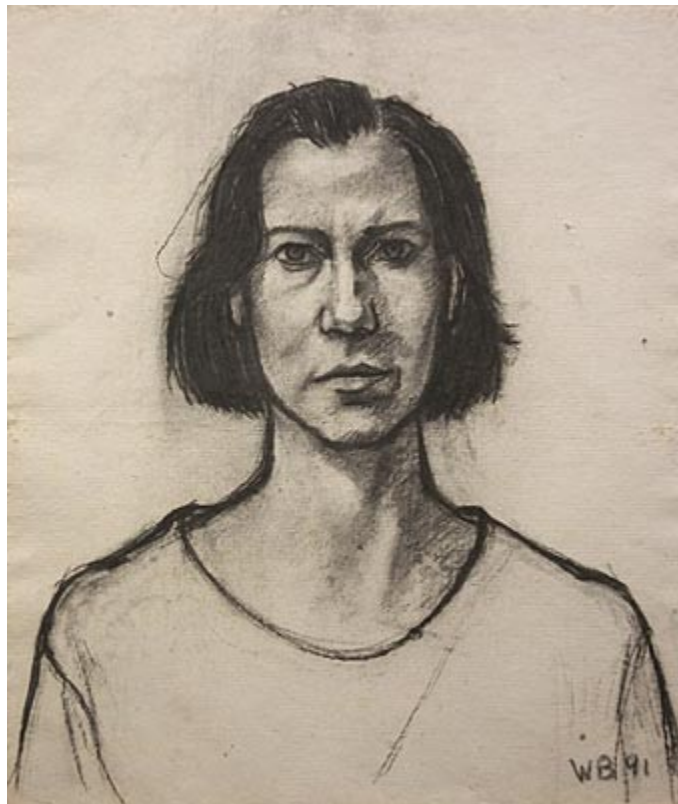
What is the appeal there? Who would buy that and why? Or how about this self portrait by William Beckman, which is sold:



Somebody, who we assume doesn't know Beckman personally, paid big money for that. But “Sweetness”, which is vastly superior, doesn't sell because it is too “portraity.” The world is full of people who think it takes more talent to paint with high detail, when the reverse is true. Beckman's painting is an unattractive photocopy, which any camera can create. He even gives us a stark white background, like a passport photo. When Beckman feels highly creative, he reaches this pinnacle of beauty:

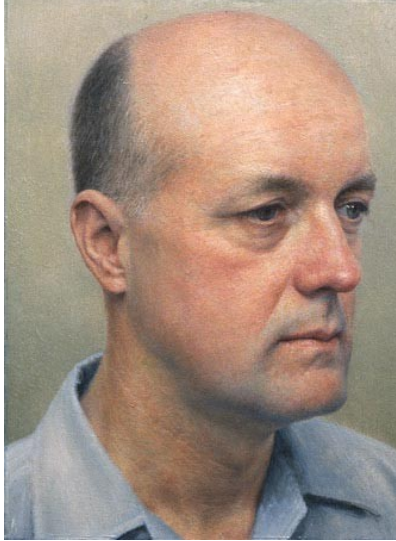


Although it has bad light, a paste-in background, no brushwork, no expression, and no mood, it sold.



Even worse are his drawings, clumsy and expressionless.

In a similar vein is Robert Bauer.



That painting is 7.5 inches tall. Impressed? I'm not. No matter how big or small it is, it is ugly and expressionless. I don't need a painting of a bald guy trying to emote like a zombie, at 7 inches or 7 feet.

These last examples are representative of realism in the top galleries. The galleries and clients actually prefer bad work. They go mad for empty and utterly inartistic photorealism, while ignoring real painting. We can see this at John Pence, as well, another top realist gallery. Look at this drawing by Michael Bergt:



That is simply a stupid pose, neither graceful nor sexy nor anything else. I have nothing against an open-pussy pose, but if you are going to do it, do something with it. The internet is stiff with sex poses that are more artistic than that, and yes, I use that first adjective on purpose.

How about this painting by Jacob Pfeiffer:



If you find that clever, you need to check your nervous system for heavy metal poisoning. Switch to a non-fluoride toothpaste.

If you like that, you will go mad for this, by William Bartlett:



It is called “Illusionist's Props”, so, yes, that is a dummy's head. I know, it is hard to tell, since most of the heads in these realist paintings look like dummies' heads.

One of Pence's most successful artists is Will Wilson, and this is one of his most published images:



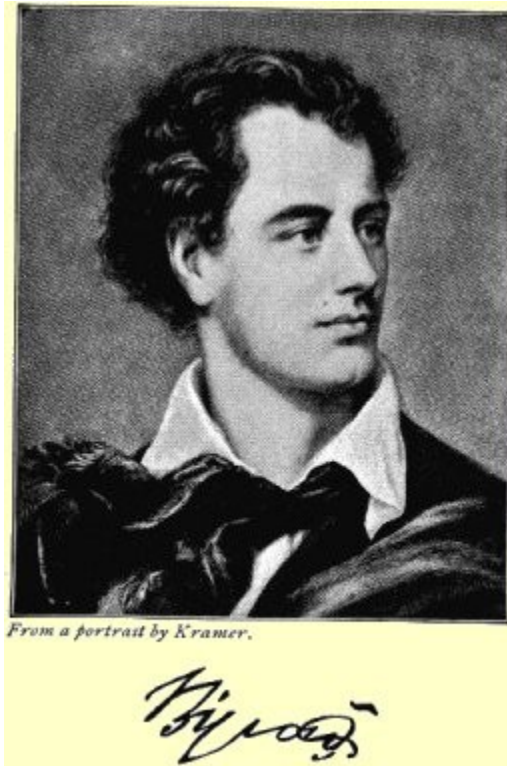
If you can't see it, I will tell you that that is ugly in every conceivable way. It is an aesthetic trainwreck, from subject to concept to model to color to composition. Anyone who finds it appealing should immediately be given a Rorschach test, a Zener test, and a test for embedded ticks.

I bring up these other artists to show you what Bo Bartlett is up against in a show at Forum and in the realist market and in the modern world. These are the gallery people and clients he is expected to impress. Personally, I see it as a further virtue that he failed to sell in this market. He would only have to worry if he *did* appeal to these folks. What a true artist wants is the greatest separation possible from the current realist market and all the degenerate people who inhabit it. Contemporary art, in all its forms—avant garde and realist—is a shallow pool of corruption, imposture, vulgarity, and false claims, and it sinks another level with each passing decade. The true artist and true connoisseur must meet well outside the normal channels, for the normal channels have long ago been coopted by various species of podpeople. A few smaller galleries here and there will have some real art, but at the top end of the market there is nothing but the whine of promotion, the vinegar of ambition, and the stench of greed.

In my opinion, Bartlett should stick to painting the beautiful women and girls around him, and give up trying to compete with the phonies. He should also give up on politics, since it isn't his forte. His wonderful portraits of his wife are worth more than all the fake realism in a hundred galleries put together, and if they don't sell, well, that is the world's loss, not his.

THE 75 GREATEST BOOKS EVER WRITTEN

by Miles Mathis



Oh! nature's noblest gift—my grey goose-quill!
Slave of my thoughts, obedient to my will. —*Byron*

First published March 2009.

Updated January 2017 to include more recent research on these authors.

In September of 2008, *Esquire* magazine published a list of the 75 greatest books ever written. Since I don't subscribe to any magazines, I only just stumbled across it on the internet. I found the list so preternaturally provincial, callow, and time-locked that I felt I had to comment on it and provide an alternate list for those young men *not* striving to become the next male Oprah Winfrey.

Here is the list. Please read it carefully, including the “clever” blurbs I have taken straight from the article.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, by Raymond Carver. “That morning she pours Teacher’s over my belly and licks it off. That afternoon she tries to jump out the window.” And that’s not even the best line.

Collected Stories of John Cheever

Deliverance, by James Dickey

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck. Because it’s all about the titty.

Blood Meridian, by Cormac McCarthy

The Brothers Karamazov, by Fyodor Dostoevsky

The Known World, by Edward P. Jones

The Good War, by Studs Terkel

American Pastoral, by Philip Roth

A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories, by Flannery O’Connor

The Things They Carried, by Tim O’Brien. No one else has written so beautifully about human remains hanging from tree branches.

A Sport and a Pastime, by James Salter

The Call of the Wild, by Jack London

Time’s Arrow, by Martin Amis

A Sense of Where You Are, by John McPhee

Hell’s Angels, by Hunter S. Thompson. Because it’s his first book, and because he got his ass kicked for it, and because in the book and the beating were the seeds of all that came after, including the bullet in the head.

Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison

Dubliners, by James Joyce

Rabbit, Run, by John Updike

The Postman Always Rings Twice, by James M. Cain

Dog Soldiers, by Robert Stone. Begins in Saigon, ends in Death Valley. Somewhere in between you realize that profit is second only to survival

Winter’s Bone, by Daniel Woodrell. The best book by a modern-day Twain, high on meth, drowsy with whiskey

Legends of the Fall, by Jim Harrison. Because of revenge. Because Harrison is as masculine and raw and unrelenting as they come.

Under the Volcano, by Malcolm Lowry

The Naked and the Dead, by Norman Mailer

The Professional, by W.C. Heinz

For Whom the Bell Tolls, by Ernest Hemingway. A lesson in manhood: even when you're damned, you press on.

Dispatches, by Michael Herr

Tropic of Cancer, Henry Miller

Revolutionary Road, by Richard Yates

As I Lay Dying, by William Faulkner

Slaughterhouse-Five, by Kurt Vonnegut

The Killer Angels, by Michael Shaara. Because the Battle of Gettysburg took place in that blue-gray area between black and white.

All the King's Men, by Robert Penn Warren

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, by Ken Kesey

Sophie's Choice, by William Styron. It's not about Sophie or her choice. It's about Stingo.

A Fan's Notes, by Frederick Exley

Lucky Jim, by Kingsley Amis

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, by Haruki Murakami

Plainsong, by Kent Haruf. Because: "A girl is different. They want things. They need things on a regular schedule. Why, a girl's got purposes you and me can't even imagine. They got ideas in their heads you and me can't even suppose."

Master and Commander, by Patrick O'Brian

A Confederacy of Dunces, by John Kennedy Toole. The fart joke as literature.

This Boy's Life, by Tobias Wolff

Affliction, by Russell Banks

Winter's Tale, by Mark Helprin

The Adventures of Augie March, by Saul Bellow

Women, by Charles Bukowski

Going Native, by Stephen Wright

Heart of Darkness, by Joseph Conrad

The Crack-Up, by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Because Fitzgerald knew Lindsay, Britney and the Olsens better than we do. (And because it was first published in *Esquire*.)

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, by John LeCarré

CivilWarLand in Bad Decline, by George Saunders

War and Peace, by Leo Tolstoy

The Shining, by Stephen King

Winesburg, Ohio, by Sherwood Anderson

Midnight's Children, by Salman Rushdie

Moby Dick, Herman Melville

Labyrinths, by Jorge Luis Borges

The Right Stuff, by Tom Wolfe

The Sportswriter, by Richard Ford

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, by Alex Haley

American Tabloid, by James Ellroy

What It Takes, by Richard Ben Cramer

The Power and the Glory, by Graham Greene. A kind of flesh-bound Bible.

The Continental Op, by Dashiell Hammett

So Long, See You Tomorrow, by William Maxwell

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, by James Agee and Walker Evans

Native Son, by Richard Wright

Angle of Repose, by Wallace Stegner

The Dharma Bums, by Jack Kerouac

The Great Bridge, by David McCullough

Lonesome Dove, by Larry McMurtry

Underworld, by Don DeLillo

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain

Lolita, by Vladimir Nabokov

What is the most amazing statistic about that list? Do you need Gloria Steinem to tell you? I don't. One out of seventy-five, 1/75. According to *Esquire*, men don't need to read books by women. They can get

all the information they need from Kent Haruf, who is so wise to women that he knows that, "They got ideas in their heads you and me can't even suppose." No need to discover what those ideas really are, by reading Jane Austen or George Eliot or A. S. Byatt. No, just knowing that women are alien is enough.

But let's look at all those blurbs, in order. The Raymond Carver quote is embarrassing for both the quoter and the quoted. It is hard to tell what is the *best* line in the book, but this isn't the worst line in the book. It *is* representative of the book, however, and that is the problem. The homely sentence posing as modern, the careless posing as spare, and the insensible posing as humorous. Beyond that, I am not convinced anyone at *Esquire* actually read the book, since this quote is taken straight from Amazon.com.³ You would think that someone who had read the book could choose their own favorite quote. If that isn't the best quote, why not lead with the best? Because that would require reading the book and forming a real opinion.

After that we are told that *The Grapes of Wrath* is "all about the titty." Yes, just as *The Odyssey* is all about the poontang. Go Calypso! Who says these guys aren't qualified to judge great literature?

The Tim O'Brien blurb is pretty accurate, although they might have said the same of Cormac McCarthy. In neither case does the prose match the subject.

Re the Hunter S. blurb: Should we really consider reading books for those reasons? But the editors at *Esquire* clearly do. Take note: this is the level of things that impress them.

In the Robert Stone blurb, we find that "profit is second only to survival." To Donald Trump, maybe.

In the Daniel Woodrell blurb, we have the modern-day Twain both high and drowsy. One question, would Twain, transported into the 21st century, really be writing on meth and whiskey? No boys, it was and still would be cigars.

We should read Jim Harrison because "Harrison is as masculine and raw and unrelenting as they come." And because he has a big hairy dick, no doubt. Could these editors sound any more wimpy and repressed?

Then we get another "lesson in manhood" with Hemingway. These guys even admit they need a lesson in manhood, and go to books to get it. I wonder if they have tried gay porn.

Then we find out that "Gettysburg took place in that blue-gray area between black and white." The guys couldn't come up with anything here, so they just cribbed from the jacket flap, stealing copy from Joe the Office Squibber.

Also good to know that *Sophie's Choice* is about Stingo (since he's the narrator). They had to read all the way through page one to discover that brilliant insight.

Then we get a rotten quote from Kent Haruf, which could have just as easily have been penned by Rocky Balboa.

After that, we learn that *A Confederacy of Dunces* is the “fart joke as literature”. An intelligent reader would not necessarily take that as a recommendation, but *Esquire* knows its audience.

The Fitzgerald blurb is perhaps the worst of the bunch. F. Scott would not want to know Britney or the Olsons any better (or at all) but clearly these editors do, and they go to literature for clandestine tips.

Lastly, we are told that Greene has written “a kind of flesh-bound Bible.” Really? Supposing that has some meaning beyond one that Hannibal Lecter would understand, I find it unlikely that Greene has exceeded the Bible in any category, especially in fleshiness, rawness, or the ability to bind.

Now, I have to admit I haven’t read all the books in this list. But I also have to admit that these blurbs don’t lead me to rush out and devour those few I am missing. Just the opposite. A recommendation in this company falls like acid into my ear. Beyond that, the list is heavy with new novels, and I avoid new novels like the plague. These editors don’t seem to understand that literature does not have to be novels, or even fiction. What this list needs is a scrubbing of modern novels written for businessmen, ex-jocks, and panty boys who think they wish they had a war to go to, and their replacement with writings that could actually broaden a reader beyond the late-American war/sports/hometown boy level.

That takes us down to this list:

Y *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck.

Y *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky

X *Dubliners*, by James Joyce

X *Slaughterhouse-Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut

X *Winter’s Tale*, by Mark Helprin

Y *War and Peace*, by Leo Tolstoy

Y *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville

X *Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain

X *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov

[The Xs and Ys were added 2017. X indicates a probable agent; Y indicates a possible agent. Or, X indicates someone I have since researched and found to be compromised; Y indicates someone I have not researched, but who has sent up red flags in the research of others.]

That leaves us 66 places to fill. But I can’t even leave this list of 9 alone. The first half of *Huckleberry Finn* is a masterpiece, but the rest is bombast. Same with *Lolita*. I like both these authors, though, and want to leave them on the list, so I am just going to replace the books recommended.

X *The Mysterious Stranger*, by Mark Twain

X *Speak, Memory*, by Vladimir Nabokov

To be clear, I still recommend reading about Lolita and Huck. I just think their faults keep them off this list. In this way, I am tipping my hand: my list will not be the 75 greatest books ever written, but 75 recommended authors, with sample books. The first list would be heavy with repeats, and Shakespeare and Nietzsche and Dostoevsky would hog all the top spots. Kurt Vonnegut and Mark Helprin wouldn't hope to make such list, and even so I am keeping them mainly as a nod to the present. It is unlikely that anything from the 20th century would make a final list, compiled by the gods, but I also have an eye to my audience. Neither they nor I want a list without anything readable on it. They can get a list of textbooks from St. John's College, but I am trying to make up a list here that is at the same time broad, readable, enlightening, and iconoclastic. No sense me giving you a list that is the same as everyone else's list.

Here is the rest of the list:

Y *Sartor Resartus*, Thomas Carlyle

X *Lectures*, Max Muller

Y *Postscript to the Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Karl Popper

Gypsy Ballads, Federico Garcia Lorca

X *Revolt of the Masses*, José Ortega y Gasset

X *Relativity*, Albert Einstein

X *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt

Y *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath

The Crown of Wild Olive, John Ruskin

Y *The Unsettling of America*, Wendell Berry

Y *The American Language*, H. L. Mencken

The Gentle Art of Making Enemies, James McNeil Whistler

Notebooks, Leonardo da Vinci

X *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell

Sketches from a Hunter's Album, Ivan Turgenev

Don Quixote, Manuel Cervantes

I, Claudius, Robert Graves

Y *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens

Y *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel Proust

The Wild Duck, Henrik Ibsen

The Golden Bough, James Frazer
Y *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare
Faust, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Y *Middlemarch*, George Eliot
X *Manfred*, Byron
Y *Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann
Oedipus Rex, Sophocles
Y *Darwinism*, Alfred Russell Wallace
Y *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift
The Lives of a Cell, Lewis Thomas
Poems of Ossian, James Macpherson
Y *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen
The Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy
The Cherry Orchard, Anton Chekhov
Poems, John Keats
Y *The Fall*, Albert Camus
Gigi, Colette
Y *Little Big Man*, Thomas Berger
Girl in a Swing, Richard Adams
Nibelungenlied, Anon.
Kalevala, Elias Lonnrot
Letters, Vincent van Gogh
Kristin Lavransdatter, Sigrid Undset
Y *Wives and Daughters*, Elizabeth Gaskell
The Tale of Genji, Murasaki Shikibu
Y *Poems*, Heinrich Heine
Haiku, Matsuo Basho
Y *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Blake

Y *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe

Y *The Catcher in the Rye*, J. D. Salinger

Y *Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton

Civil Disobedience, Henry David Thoreau

The Lord of the Rings, J. R. R. Tolkien

Y *Essays*, Ralph Waldo Emerson

Y *Possession*, A. S. Byatt

On the Genealogy of Morals, Friedrich Nietzsche

Y *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud

Silent Spring, Rachel Carson

Y *Dialogues*, Plato

Iliad, Homer

Daodejing, Laozi

X *Deterring Democracy*, Noam Chomsky

Les Contemplations, Victor Hugo

Y *Meditations*, Rene Descartes

At Swim-Two-Birds, Flann O'Brien

Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee, Dee Brown

[As you see, I have learned a lot in the past 7 years. It is possible that many others of these authors are compromised, or *all* of them, but I will have to discover that for myself. I would strike several of these listings completely, but I leave them up for historical reasons—so that we can both remember how this paper was originally written. The ones I would strike right now are Chomsky, Nabokov, Arendt, Joyce, Twain, Muller, Orwell, and Byron.]

I had to nix Euclid's *Elements* and Newton's *Principia* as not highly readable, although they are greater books than some on this list. I also bumped other classics like *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Aeneid*, to make room for books you are more likely to read. I am replacing the *Esquire's* top 75, after all, not Mortimer Adler's top 100. Admittedly, Karl Popper and Einstein are not much easier to read, but they are a bit closer to home.

The main difference, it seems to me, in my list and theirs is that I am not trying to “prove my manhood” or show how hairy my arms are. I don't care if you know I am a man, much less an American man, but the guys at *Esquire* have to throw that in your face on every page, as if they are competing with the editors at *Playboy* or *Maxim*. They don't want to be mistaken for Oprah Book Club

pansies, so they don't include Annie Proulx or Barbara Kingsolver, but in making up this list they have done Oprah one worse. At least Oprah is un-self-consciously shallow and insular and pathetic. These guys couldn't be more transparent in their need to read about murder and war and sports and the mob and cowboys and all the other middle-America pseudo-manly pseudo-mythology of fake self-support. Oprah and her 50 million girls have no eye for beauty or depth, but at least they don't choose their soft-core reading to be "girly." These guys, as is usual with the modern man, have one eye on the mirror and one eye on their co-workers, even as they claim to read a book. This means they must be reading with their noses.

And even that may be giving them too much credit. In compiling my own list¹, I realized how easy it would have been for *Esquire* to have compiled this list from other lists, without ever cracking a cover. I have already shown you how they borrowed their Carver quote, and the rest of the blurbs are equally suspect. It looks to me like *Esquire* collated two lists. First, they got a list of recent book award winners, going back to, say, 1980. Then they sprinkled that list lightly with choices from a great books list, probably the Modern Library list. Their list has so few older books simply because they didn't recognize much on the great books list. It was safer to stick with recent critically acclaimed novels than to risk that an older choice had become uncool, for reasons unknown to them.

And even that may be giving them too much credit. It is also possible, even likely, that this list is only a partial fake, rather than a total fake. Meaning, the selection committee didn't just cobble together other lists, they actually tried to read these books, tried to like them, and convinced themselves that they kind of did. This is worse because it is infinitely more pathetic than just flat out lying. I could respect someone who at least knew modern literature wasn't worth fooling with, and just copied off the next guy's paper to save himself the trouble. But it is hard to respect someone who not only listens to critics, but also takes them at their word.

Yes, this is the modern way to look smart: you read the *New York Times* and then parrot its opinions. If the publishers tell you Don DeLillo is a great writer, via the hired hacks at the newspapers and magazines, then Don DeLillo is a great writer. You would look like a fool to deny it.

In this way, literary criticism is an analogue of art criticism. Why should we expect readers to have independent opinions when art buyers and museum goers do not? The current milieu has made it clear that, in art, people will take whatever you give them, and say they like it. With books, we should expect the same. As in art, the prize committees are populated by people with direct connections to the market, and they are in the business of promotion. The reader's job is to swallow this promotion down whole, and the modern reader does this job quite well. Critics and publishers bemoan the fact that "serious literature" sells so poorly, but given its quality, I am amazed it sells so well. I can't believe the market finds a single reader for most of this "poetry" and novelizing and commentary.

While I am here recommending things, I will recommend one of the only sensible critiques of modern novels I have ever seen, B. R. Myers' *A Reader's Manifesto*.² Parts of it were published in 2001 in *Atlantic*, and it has since been published as a book. While in my opinion Myers still doesn't go far

enough, as a whole, in his critique of new novels, he goes into much finer detail than I have been able to go here.

1For the record, I made up my list straight from my own shelves. I have all these books in my house right now (unless they are loaned out to friends).

2http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Reader%27s_Manifesto

3[http://www.amazon.com/What-Talk-About-When-Love/dp/0679723056/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?
ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1237166828&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/What-Talk-About-When-Love/dp/0679723056/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1237166828&sr=8-1)

Claudio Bravo

AT MARLBOROUGH GALLERY - LONDON

by Miles Mathis



Fools are my theme, let satire be my song. —Byron

I was in London last week for the Michelangelo show at the British Museum and I happened to walk by the Bravo show while I was strolling New Bond and Albemarle streets with a friend afterwards. Now, I have to admit that I didn't spend much time in the gallery. I didn't count the number of pieces exhibited or measure them or get a list of titles or prices or any of that, so many are going to think me a rather accidental critic. I did, however, develop a very strong opinion within seconds (as will surprise no one). It is that opinion I wish to sell here, not the work of Bravo or Marlborough.

I think there were about 20 works, all similar in size (4 or 5 feet tall) and nearly identical in subject, that subject being brown paper packages tied up in string. Not, mind you, packages painted from different angles and in different light. Nothing that blindingly poignant and interesting. No, simple straight-on blow-ups of photographs of packages, such as one might see decorating the walls at Starbucks or United Parcel Service. These, however, were not photographic enlargements, they were paintings made to *look* like photographic enlargements. *Wow*, you say. A philosophical conundrum. A deep statement about reality and art and modern society, framed as only a great artist can frame it.

Or, as Spanish art critic Francisco Calvo Seraller put it in the catalog, “the multiplication of meanings—awakening and evoking different feelings with a simple wrinkled sheet of paper.”

Perhaps, but honestly the first thought that sprung to my contrarian brain was that Bravo had at last reached the age of Alzheimer’s, and that for some reason beyond the ken of science he had encountered a permanent feedback loop—a loop limited to songs from *The Sound of Music*. I imagined that his next show would be huge blow-ups of raindrops on roses, followed by whiskers on kittens, then bright copper kettles, and finally warm woolen mittens. His swansong would of course be schnitzel with noodles. Contemporary art is so comforting when the dog bites, when the bee stings.

Why else would anyone bother to go to such trouble to paint such a thing as brown paper packages tied up in string? Even more, how could a brain that was not in some terrible hell of repetition and closure stand to paint such a thing not twice, not three times, but over and over and over without variance? That brain must be compelled by some Rodgers and Hammerstein obsession, moving it like a child’s poppet.

In fact my theory is supported by other material from the gallery, which tells us that the paper packages are “a theme he started working on at the end of the ‘60’s.” *The Sound of Music* debuted in 1965. Coincidence? You decide.

Poor man, to be in such a loop for 40 years. He must feel like the man who has been hiccupping for half a century. And here I thought it was old age that had brought it on. The von Trapp family seduced him early and has never let him go.

But this explanation, as powerful as it was, didn’t quite cover all the facts. For it didn’t begin to explain how Marlborough Gallery had got caught in Bravo’s feedback loop, how the director and all the sales staff had succumbed, how the buyers had succumbed, how the critics and magazines had succumbed, how the majority of foot traffic on Albemarle Street had succumbed to Bravo’s private nightmare. Was some worldwide Muzak being piped into all the ears of the earth save mine? Had *The Sound of Music* soundtrack really taken over the governance of the zeitgeist, forcing it by subtle whisperings to follow motions that must seem alien to me?

I leave that all as a distinct possibility, not to be dismissed simply because it is absurd. These days, the more absurd an explanation is the more likely it is to be true. But I do offer a second explanation, and I aim this one at my fellow realists. In previous papers I have commented on Bravo in passing, and there I stated that for all his technical skill Bravo had always seemed to me to be in want of a subject. Even back when he was painting things unprompted by Julie Andrews, he was lost when it came to content. He could always paint anything he could see, but he could never imbue it with any emotion or depth. He could not choose an expressive model, a passionate pose or a revealing light. His paintings never had a mood.

This newest work is just the bottoming out of a long slow decline from a hill that was not tall to begin with. This current show acts as nothing so much as visual proof of my previous critiques. In fact, this current show acts as nothing except that. If my thesis were not waiting to be proved beyond a doubt, this current show would be a total loss to the universe. It is an artistic nullity not to be out-nulled by anything the avant garde has ever done. Doubtless this is why Bravo is attended by great wealth and fame: he has achieved, via realism, a void as fully relevant to the confusions of modern art criticism as any broken urinal or set of soiled toothpicks.

Why this is aimed at my fellow realists is that many of them are on the same long slow decline from nowhere to east-of-below-nowhere. Like Bravo they are caught in some technical obsession, and they use that obsession to mask the fact that they have absolutely nothing to offer the world beyond shiny paint. They spend the better part of every day and year discussing mediums and varnishes and tricks and methods and edges and nanoballs and lord knows what else, but they don't spend a minute or a second trying to find a meaningful subject—a face with some expression, a pose with some subtlety, a scene with a strong mood, a story with some strength. They seem to think that all these things can be added later with a fancy set of lightbulbs and reflectors, or by oversaturating all the colors, or by painting everything backlit by a sunset or a pair of ornate candelabras. In this they become absolute masters of the inessential while remaining blind to the essential.

As painters of the visual we must know our craft. There is no getting past that. But the craft, the technique, of painting is only the first step. It is the means to an end. *What end?* This is the question that the realists must ask themselves.

I maintain that verisimilitude is not the answer. It *does* matter what you paint. The bulk of the art is in the content, not in the technique. Therefore a man who chooses to paint high-detail paintings of brown paper packages tied up in string is not choosing to create art. He is choosing to remain a technician. He is choosing not to go beyond the first step. He is not a “preciosista”, as Bravo claims that he is content being. A precious painter would be one with excessive refinement. But there is nothing to refine here. It is flat-out impossible to “awaken and evoke different feelings with a simple wrinkled sheet of paper.” A person who has feelings awakened by a photocopy of a sheet of paper is not precious, he is addled. Such a person could be made to hear Mozart by rattling his head with thimbles, or made to see heaven by. . . what? I can't think of anything less evocative than a wrinkled piece of paper, especially painted as Bravo has painted it—drained of all possible interest. I have seen some beautifully painted pieces of paper in old master paintings, but Bravo doesn't even allow himself, or us, that pleasure. No, his paintings are lit to look like magazine ads. Like those scary Coca-cola bottles, dripping fake water, everything brightly lit and antiseptic and false, false, false. The feelings evoked in me by these pre-packaged things are the same feelings evoked by formica countertops and orange highway cones and silicone breasts—either nothing or absolute and utter horror. A painter who is genuinely attracted to such things is not precious, he is shallow, boring, and pathological. He should not be showered with accolades, he should be avoided as a vexation to the spirit, as a daemon from a

parallel universe, as a podperson posing as a human being. Or at best as a lonely goatherd marionette in the grip of Rodgers and Hammerstein, odelay, odelay, odelay hee-hoo.

Sleeping Nude



bronze, ed. 33

12 x 7 x 6 in.

Canal Bridge, Bruges



pastel, 19 x 12 in.

BUDDHISM: *the stronger poison*

by Miles Mathis

Some have expressed anger, sorrow, pity, or disappointment at my recent paper on yoga. But rather than back down, I will press on, as is my way. I reject all these emotions directed at me; or, rather, I use them as food for further meditations. That is, I reject their intended effects, since I have never been one to be turned by the pity or anger of others; but I feed on the emotional content of the words and air around me, as a tree feeds on sunlight or carbon. Rather than flee from passionate replies, I run toward them, turning their energy to my own uses. Unlike the Buddha, I would embrace all the emotions, even the so-called negative ones, to fuel my enlightenment. Unlike Yoda, I would embrace the dark side, since there is no dark side. All energy can be turned to good use, by any real Yoda or yogi. Again, there is no dark side, there is only a darker or brighter use of energy.

I mention Buddha in this opening paragraph, because, although yoga is not a religion, it tends to be joined in the modern world to Buddhism. This is especially true in the West, where Hinduism is hardly viable. You will hear Indian words in yoga classes, but almost no one takes the Indian gods seriously (except maybe Surya). It is normally Buddhism that supplies the spiritual advice of the western yogi or yogini, and the Buddha had the one very western—one might say Lutheran—recommendation that an adept did not require the lesser gods to pray to or sacrifice to: one could commune directly with the Source. So here I will go beyond the doubts and generalizations of my first paper. Here I will look at a central text of Buddhism: the life of the Buddha, as compiled by Asvaghosha.* Buddhism is usually filled and extended by the other ancient texts of the East, but the life of the Buddha supplies the outline to which these texts must conform. Buddhism did not overwrite the earlier texts like the Vedas, but, using the life of the Buddha, it emphasized and de-emphasized previous teachings to suit its own more ascetic and mystical regimen.

This is a paper, not a book, so it will of necessity once again be brief. I do not pretend it is scholarly, complete, or authoritative. How could it be authoritative, since I am an authority to no one but myself. I only offer it as an observation, to be taken as it is taken.

Nietzsche, in *The Anti-Christ*, compared Christianity to Buddhism, and in his comparison Christianity came off poorly. He believed that Buddhism was much “cleaner” and “lighter.” He saw Buddhism as mainly a regimen of health, to ward off spiritual malaise. It was a response to an illness, and a rather rational response, according to him. Christianity, however, he saw as a much greater illness, and its response to this illness was not at all healthy or rational. In fact, the cure was more pathological than the disease. Nietzsche's argument was brilliant, as usual, and on a first reading I accepted his greater wisdom. I was 18 at the time, and in no position to contradict Friedrich Nietzsche. Besides, I had no desire or need to defend either Christianity or Buddhism. I honestly didn't care which one was more

pathological. It seemed to me like arguing about whether arsenic or strychnine would kill you faster: on discovering which it was, you didn't immediately take a dose of the slower poison. You assiduously avoided both, as before.

But as Buddhism has continued to grow in popularity in the West, I have found myself in more and more situations where I had to tell it to go away. As I have refused many drugs, I have had to refuse the drug of Buddhism, and this has caused a long line of pushers of enlightenment to ask me why, either with words or with their inquiring eyes. Why would I refuse this boon? Why would I look at the newly religious with a low but poorly disguised disgust? Why did I seem so desirous of keeping my hands clean of this latest movement?

It was not something I could answer in a moment, or in a few lines of conversation, so I never did answer it. But I do have an answer, and I am now prepared to put it to paper. To answer it, I will have to go straight to the source. Concerning the birth of Buddha, one of the first things we are told is this:

Whilst she [his mother] thus religiously observed the rules of a pure discipline, Bodhisattva was born from her right side, come to deliver the world, constrained by great pity, without causing his mother pain or anguish.

As you can see, this religion is all too familiar. It is in denial against life and against the real world from the first word. It implies that a woman who observes a pure discipline in child-birth will be blessed with a painless birth. Not so. It implies that there is something holy about the right side of the body. Not so. It implies that a holy being could or would want to avoid causing pain or anguish, and that he or she would do this because of pity. Not so. We all feel pain and anguish, and no amount of pity will remove it. A far wiser man from the East, Lao-tze, taught that acceptance of pain and anguish and death was the real transcendence.

All things in Nature bloom and then return from whence they came. This is the fulfillment of their destiny. This reversion is an eternal law. To know it is wisdom.

By that he didn't mean we should have a disregard for those in pain or anguish, or that we shouldn't avoid causing pain when it was unnecessary. He meant we should recognize pain and anguish and even death as gifts from the gods, whoever they are, equal to the gifts of pleasure and contentment. If it were not necessary for the body and mind to feel pain and anguish, Nature would not have included them in our bodies and minds. It seems to me this is the wisdom the Buddha was utterly without his entire life (as we will see below).

Soon after, we find this:

[Says the Buddha, as a child:] This birth is in the condition of a Buddha; after this I have done with renewed birth; now only am I born this once, for the purpose of saving all the world.

Again, very familiar, and very unnatural. Imagine a leaf saying this, or a flower. “I am done with the cycle of Nature! I am done with being composted and reborn into another day under the Sun! I demand to be a leaf forever, undying, and as an eternal leaf, I will save all the world!” We would find our little leaf more than a bit ridiculous. Who is a leaf to tell Nature what he will and will not do? And how can a leaf save all the world? What is more, why does this leaf imagine the world needs saving? No, the Buddha is an awful little brat from his swaddling clothes, and no wise person could listen to his chirping without pain.

The author now tells us:

When Bodhisattva was born, he came to remove the sorrows of all living things.

Thanks, but I am attached to my sorrows and have no desire to give them up. They are the deepest arrows I have in my quiver, and my art would become impossible without my sorrows. I would sooner be relieved of my joys.

The family's soothsayer then tells the Buddha's father,

One endowed with such transcendent marks must reach the state of Samyak-Sambodhi, or, if he be induced to engage in worldly delights, then he must become a universal monarch; everywhere recognized as the ruler of the great earth, mighty in his righteous government, as a monarch ruling the four empires, uniting under his sway all other rulers.

Save us from New World Orders or Global Governments, whether ruled over by those with transcendent marks or not. But since the Buddha did not choose this “worldly” route, we will pass over that and ask instead what the state of Sambodhi consists of. Sambodhi is universal knowledge and perfect wisdom. Again, somewhat of an overreach for a being born of woman, I would say. If our little leaf wanted to be a god, we would laugh, but when a pretty prince wants to be a god, we do not laugh. Why?

The Buddha's father doubts the godliness of his son, saying that no man has been perfect before, but the Soothsayer corrects him. He tells of other men who came before who reached the state of Sambodhi. So we learn from the author Asvaghosha, speaking through the soothsayer, that previous authors of books were gods: Polosa, who compiled the Sutras; Valmiki, who wrote the *Ramayana*, and so on. Asvaghosha no doubt hoped the future will deify him in the same way, and some have.

Then came the seer Rishi down from the mountains, like the three wise men, led by the devas or spirits to praise the young prince, and to confirm him. And how did Rishi confirm him: by the webs between his fingers and the “wool-like prominence” between his eyes. This must mean that Ashton Kutcher will soon achieve Sambodhi. We should check the soles of his feet for thousand-rayed wheels.

The Rishi then tells the father:

All flesh submerged in the sea of sorrow; all diseases collected as the bubbling froth; decay and age like the wild billows; death like the engulfing ocean; embarking lightly in the boat of wisdom he will save the world from all these perils, by wisdom stemming back the flood.

The Buddha will save the world from decay and age and death? Anyone who has visited India would not find that wise. They already have over a billion people, many of them living in squalor. Imagine if all the people who have lived in India since the Buddha were still alive. The population would be in the trillions. That is not “wisdom stemming back the flood.” That is pathology causing the flood.

What we have here is not wisdom, it is an author, in his infinite ignorance, second-guessing the mechanisms of Nature, and calling this pity. Call me irreligious, but I prefer Nature to these infantile stories of an unstudied perfection.

The Buddha is then spoiled for many years, as only the son of a monarch could be, with jeweled couches and heavenly songs and other emasculating fripperies. At least Christ was the son of carpenter, and did some work. But the Buddha is a light-footed prince, prancing down lush hallways and partaking of sweetmeats on verandas and so on. Well, everything goes on in this way until the Buddha, now a young man, first sees an aged man. His father had protected him from all sorrow and imperfection up to that time (age 29!), but suddenly the Buddha learns of death. He is sad. Then he learns that he too will die. He is doubly sad. Sometime after, he sees a sick man. He is sad. Then he learns that he too may become sick at any time. He is doubly sad. Then he see a funeral procession, and is sad, etc, etc.

His father gets angry at his drivers, that they allowed his son to see a sick man or an old man. Yes, the father is just as unappealing a character as his son, both of them completely hysterical and spoiled and unnatural. Then Udayi comes to the young Buddha and tells him to cheer up and enjoy life: to enjoy the charms of women and so on. But the Buddha, who cannot abide change, cannot enjoy that which is not eternal. Remember, he has been kept wrapped in plastic for 29 years: how could he know anything of life or feel anything *for* life? Finally, seeing some ploughmen ploughing the fields, the Buddha is overwhelmed with disgust and has to flee into the wilderness.

I was struck upon reading this passage. I remembered how Van Gogh, seeing people work the fields, was filled with reverence. He thought something like, “How lovely that these people get to work in the field, planting things that will grow, having their hands in the soil, under the watchful eye of the warming Sun. I will paint these people, as a sign of my love for them.” Which feeling is more holy?

If reading chapter one of the life of the Buddha doesn't turn you into an ally of Mara, you aren't reading very closely.

Mara is the king of the world of desire. According to the Buddhist theogony he is the god of sensual love. He holds the world in sin. He was the enemy of Buddha, and endeavored in every way to defeat him. He is also described as the king of death.

Now, you can read that passage with Mara as some kind of Eastern devil or Satan, or you can just take him as the anti-Buddha. Since there is nothing Satanic about sensual love or death, I don't see him as Satanic or evil. We are not told how he "holds the world in sin," unless sex itself is sinful. But, of course, if the Buddha is successful in banishing death, he must also banish sex. You can't have both. He must banish not only sex, but also children. Immortals have no need of sex or children.

I hope you can see that in this text, the Buddha actually surpasses Jesus in vilifying Nature herself. Not only is sex a sin, death is a sin. That makes Nature, and the cycle of life, a sin. Jesus recommends an ascetic life, like the Buddha, but he never positions himself as the enemy of death or of reproduction or of the cycles of Nature. Jesus damned the poor fruit tree for failing to bear, but the Buddha would praise it for having achieved mukti. The more closely I studied the life of the Buddha, the more I became convinced that Nietzsche was wrong. Buddhism is the stronger poison.

In fact, the reaction to the Buddha's teachings in India in the 4th century BC was very like my reaction in this paper. In the *Bhagavadgita*, probably written soon after the Buddha's death, we find Krishna telling the young coward Arjuna not to be so concerned with death:

Mourn not for those that live, nor those that die! Neither I, nor you, nor anyone here ever was not or ever will not be. All that lives, lives always.

That may be true, or not, but at least it doesn't stink of poison. It is a breath of fresh air after all the maunderings of the Buddha. We could understand a young soldier being traumatized by the brutalities of war. We understand soldiers returning from battle who question life and the gods, who must work through a depression or undergo a life change. But it is difficult to feel much sympathy for the young Buddha, so traumatized at age 29 by seeing an old man, a sick man, a coffin, and a ploughman, that he must ride his royal stallion into the woods, accompanied by his butler, and seek the company of a bunch of other rich Brahmin too holy and effete to face the real world. There he says his first true words to these Brahmakarins, though he seems to know it not:

Pitiful indeed are such sufferings! and merely in quest of a human or heavenly reward, ever revolving in the cycle of birth or death, how great your sufferings, how small the recompense! Leaving your friends, giving up honorable position; with a firm purpose to obtain the joys of heaven, although you may escape little sorrows, yet in the end involved in great sorrow; promoting the destruction of your outward form, and undergoing every kind of painful penance, and yet seeking to obtain another birth.

And how does the manchild think to better this pitiful plan? He plans to suffer these austerities in order

to *avoid* another birth! Ah, brilliant plan, young Siddhartha. Because you fear death, and find the very idea of it ruins your joy, you seek to have death (or its existential equivalent) now instead. Yes, you seek Nirvana, a thing never before sought by any wise man of India before you. But what is Nirvana? Nirvana is “the perfect peace of the state of mind that is free from craving, anger and other afflictive states.” This is achieved when all desire is rooted out. Nirvana is “the unconditioned (asankhata) mind, a mind that has come to a point of perfect lucidity and clarity due to the cessation of the production of volitional formations. Nirvana is deathlessness.”

To my eye, Nirvana appears to be a death wish, suicide without the knife. Notice that the Buddha has defined craving and desire as afflictions. Not just negative cravings or desires, or destructive cravings or desires, but *all* cravings and desires. A man desiring to kiss his wife: an affliction. A woman desiring to have a child, and to caress that child, and to feed that child: an affliction. A bird enjoying flight: afflicted. A fish craving to eat a fly: afflicted. A dog enjoying a bone: afflicted. A thirsty man drinking from a clear stream: afflicted. Nirvana is not deathlessness, it is lifelessness. Nirvana is not the opposite of death, life is the opposite of death. Life is deathlessness. But the Buddha has fled from life. He cannot abide it.

Beyond that, I have no desire for an “unconditioned mind.” What is wisdom but the *conditioning* of the mind? A moron has an unconditioned mind: may be quite adept at avoiding most thoughts, may even have reduced cravings or desires. Do I long for the moronic state? No.

Are you quite sure that religion is not a form of induced imbecility? Are you quite that bodhi or amata is not the most successful form of induced imbecility ever known?

Christ advised us to be like children or like the birds of the air, but even the birds and the children are not morons. Nor are they yogis. Children would never think to avoid experiences or desires. Birds would never think to avoid cravings. The whole point of living like birds or babes is to experience the rawness of life, with trust and acceptance, to take Nature as she is, to have no thought of saving the world. . . because you have no thought of “the world.” Could a beast of the field avoid desires? Can we imagine a beast of the field having a negative desire? The beast of the field, like the child, is its desires, and no harm done. Jesus must have meant something like this.

But the Buddha has no such didactic use for children or birds of the air or beasts of the field. What use has one in search of deathlessness for children?

Strong in will! bright in wisdom! firmly fixed in resolve to escape the limits of birth, knowing that in escape from birth there alone is rest, not affected by any desire after heavenly blessedness, the mind set upon the eternal destruction of the bodily form, you are indeed miraculous in appearance, as you are alone in the possession of such a mind.

So said the foremost hermit to Siddhartha, recommending he leave the woods and proceed up the

mountain to the Muni, the greatest of the ascetics. And this Muni, of name Arada, what wisdom does he have concerning the road to Nirvana?

The mind quieted and silently at rest, removing desire, and hating vice, all the sorrows of life put away, then there is happiness; and we obtain the enjoyment of the first dhyana.

And then, by squashing that joy, the yogi blots out the first dhyana, and moves to the second. Again a joy is felt, and by refusing that joy, the yogi moves on to the third. Rejecting the third dhyana is the road to the fourth, and the loss of "I" is the road to the fifth. Every advance is a rejection, you see. Bartleby the Scrivener was a natural yogi, "preferring not to." Nirvana is the saying no to everything.

Although the Buddha found the first hermits ridiculous for their mortifications, what does he do?

With full purpose of heart he set himself to endure mortification, to restrain every bodily passion, and give up thought about sustenance, with purity of heart to observe the fast-rules, which no worldly man can bear; silent and still, lost in thoughtful meditation; and so for six years he continued, each day eating one hemp grain, his bodily form shrunken and attenuated, seeking how to cross the sea of birth and death.

Brilliant. Why not say no to that one hemp grain and have done with it? Why drag out this sad story for six years? Amazingly, the Buddha agreed, and at last he thought: If I am going to eat the one hemp grain, why not have a beautiful girl feed me perfumed rice milk, pouring it into my mouth and all over my naked body? Which he did, being very refreshed. After several rounds of this (we aren't told how many) he was so fat the ground shook as he walked. So he went in search of his special Bodhi tree, where he could sit and be fat and try again to get rid of "I".

But he couldn't get rid of "I" on his own. He needed to be tempted by the devil first. So Mara arrived and shot arrows past him, and girls jiggled their melons in his face; and then an army of spirits jumped up and down and grimaced and clashed their spears and whatnot. The Buddha ignored it (this was a bit easier because he had his ipod plugged into his ears, but we aren't told that). Actually, I think I could ignore all that with my eyes closed, too. It is pretty easy to ignore arrows flying past you when you can't see them. But it is somewhat harder to ignore arrows when they land in your fat body. My question here is why Mara wasn't a better shot. What kind of a god can't hit a fat man sitting under a tree with his eyes closed? What kind of army stands around shouting and waving their arms? A pretty pathetic army. Even the girls don't do their best. Who can't ignore a girl when he can't see her? But if she grabs your willie, now that's another matter. Mara is about as much a devil as the Buddha is a circus clown.

Still unable to make any progress on his own, the Buddha now goes down to hell, like Dante and Vergil, to see all the sinners swallowing molten brass and swimming in boiling cauldrons and being forced to watch reality TV shows and so on. For someone supposed to be avoiding all thoughts, the

Buddha seems to require an awful lot of action going on around him. First an army of devils and hookers, and now a mental walk through the aisles of hell.

From studying the circles of heaven and hell, the Buddha comes to see that “sensation brings desire.” To kill desire, you must kill sensation. Sensation is caused by contact and contact is caused by the six entrances (senses).

Knowledge destroyed, names and things will cease; names and things destroyed, then knowledge perishes; ignorance destroyed, then the constituents of individual life will die; the great Rishi was thus perfected in wisdom.

And there it is, in plain language. Perfect wisdom is all knowledge destroyed. The ultimate religious contradiction, the purest poison. How do you destroy all knowledge?: induced imbecility.

“Forthwith, the Buddha rose from the Bodhi tree full of compassion for all that lived”. . . except those things that insisted on desiring or having knowledge or eating more than one grain of hemp a day. He advanced into the world with the holy intention to excise knowledge and passion from the world, and to tape over the six entrances of every living being (causing terrible worldwide flatulence).

What happiness in all the world is so great as when a loving master meets the unwise; the world with all its occupants, filled with impurity and dire confusion, with heavy grief oppressed, or, in some cases, lighter sorrows, waits deliverance; the lord of men, having escaped by crossing the wide and mournful sea of birth and death, we now entreat to rescue others.

Thanks but no thanks. The Jehovah's witnesses were here this morning and I told them the same thing. I'll wait for the next boat, the one with the maidens in it, and the roast beef. You lords of men and loving masters can go find your unwise elsewhere. Might I suggest the YMCA?

Yes, the Buddha had reached Nirvana, and now had a desire to preach it. “Because he would convert the world he went on toward Benares.” Big contradictions. Having rid himself of all desires, the Buddha desired to preach and proselytize and convert the world to his superior wisdom. And, I suppose, having rid himself of all hunger, he went to Burger King. How can someone who has gone beyond “I” still have a desire or ability to teach? Who is teaching? How can you teach with all your six holes plugged? What are you going to do, tap out the Seven Sutras and Sixteen Sastras with your head on a coconut tree? It would be easier for Helen Keller to follow the plot at IMAX.

Next, the Buddha preaches his “middle way” in Benares, a doctrine that was already cliché in 400 BC. Confucius had already taught it in China and it was over the door of the Temple at Delphi: “Nothing in excess.” It was probably over the door at Lascaux as well, but in buffalo letters. It is not especially deep. Don't eat too much or too little: don't get fat or skinny. Don't get up before you are rested and don't oversleep like a slug. And get out of the tub before your fingers get that wrinkled look!

Of course, the Buddha does have some good advice, like don't concern yourself with money. The premier Eastern mystics of the late 20th century and early 21st, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Deepak Chopra, and Bikram seemed to have missed that day under the banyan tree. Then we get the law wheels: eight right roads and and four great truths:

My true sight greater than the glory of the sun, my equal and unvarying wisdom, vehicle of insight—right words as it were a dwelling-place—wandering through the pleasant groves of right conduct, making a right life my recreation, walking along the right road of proper means, my city of refuge in right recollection, and my sleeping couch right meditation; these are the eight even and level roads by which to avoid the sorrows of birth and death.

So let's count: 1) sight 2) wisdom 3) words 4) conduct 5) recreation 6) proper means 7) recollection 8) meditation. That's a lot of stuff to think about for someone who left his “I” back under the Bodhi tree. Can't I just say a holy “no” to all this stuff? Can a yogi with his six entrances taped over have 1) true sight? 2) right words? 3) right recreation? With all your holes blocked, what kind of exercise can you do? 4) right conduct? With your eyes and ears and nose taped over, how do you know if your conduct was proper? You may have passed gas in the presence of the King. How do you know? And now the 4 truths:

Of this wheel the spokes are the rules of pure conduct; equal contemplation, their uniformity of length; firm wisdom is the tire; modesty and thoughtfulness, the rubbers (sockets in the nave in which the axle is fixed); right reflection is the nave; the wheel itself the law of perfect truth; the right truth now has gone forth in the world, not to retire before another teacher.

I wonder if the Buddha could be a little more specific? Nothing there would hold up in court. Nothing there would have impressed my 8th grade teacher, who was used to such wafflings. What conduct, what contemplation, what wisdom, what thoughtfulness? What is right reflection? What is wrong reflection? Apparently the law of perfect truth is just a list of empty platitudes.

You may have noticed that my tone in the paper became lighter as I went. I tried to take the subject seriously, really, but after a couple of chapters, I couldn't hold a straight face any longer. I find all these solemn solicitations to holiness to be absurd. I begin to feel like I am watching an episode of Mystery Science Theater 3000, starring the Bodhisattva and his wacky companions. I don't know much about the mysteries of life, but I know, from logic101, that the point of life is not to avoid living. I might possibly want to avoid nasty, negative, or unpleasant experiences (then again I may not), but I certainly do not want to avoid *all* experiences. I may want to avoid gross sex, sexual addiction, profligacy, or incest, but I do not wish to avoid all sex. I may wish to live an upright life, a life of rightness or rectitude or virtue, but I wouldn't dream of thinking that sitting under a banyan tree staring at my own third eye, trying to say no to all thought and desire, was an example of that virtue. Furthermore: why would the Buddha try to transcend Nature, to escape the cycle of birth and death, by sitting under a

beautiful tree? The tree should kick him in the tush and tell him to go sit in a plastic cubicle if he doesn't like Nature. If I were that tree, I would drop a heavy branch on his fat head.

I think there is a reason that Buddhism has become popular in the contemporary West, and it isn't because it is an advance over Christianity. It is precisely because it is a further reversion into shallow vanity and a pathological inversion. It is actually an increase in the poison dosage, required by a society that has an ever greater tolerance for poisons like this. It is no coincidence that a society engulfed by a love for plastic in all its forms, from plastic bags to plastic homes to plastic personalities, would also be drawn to Buddhism. As our society as become evermore anti-natural, our religion must be, too. Christianity was already anti-natural to incredible degrees, as Nietzsche has already proved. I am not here to rehabilitate Jesus, mind you. But the Buddha makes Christ look almost pagan. Christ was an incredible man of action compared to the Buddha, with his fits of temper in the marketplace to his healing of lepers to his walking on water. With Christ we get hints of humanity and of a personality. He is surrounded by his Marys and Marthas. But the Buddha is like a machine. His own mother died on the 7th day, and we may assume it was from the chill.

I found myself frightened by the whole tale: not so much that a story like this could be told 2,500 years ago, when I assumed that people were still attached to the Earth (although that, too), but that it could be taken as an example of godliness or holiness. What kind of monsters are inspired by such a story? I cannot fathom reading this and thinking that I wanted to be like the Buddha. I mean, it is hard enough to imagine a sickness of mind so advanced it could lead a man to avoid the sorrows of the world by fleeing into the desert to mortify himself. How can you solve the problem of externally inflicted pain by replacing it with self-inflicted pain? But the Buddha's solution is even more radical than this Eastern holiness that came before him. At least pain is some real sensation: we may imagine that in a diseased mind it is close enough to pleasure to stand for it. But the Buddha does not allow these men, these poor Brahmakarinis in the forest, even that consolation. He wants them instead to seek a death-like trance, devoid of all thought, desire, and memory. Is that not more horrible than any pain or sorrow? How can you fear death, and then recommend a near-dead living as the remedy? The fundamental idea, stripped of the religion, is a gross contradiction.

I felt much of this when I first read the story decades ago. Every decade I go back to it, to see if it has taken on a new meaning. And, truth to tell, it always *does* take on a new meaning. Every decade the story of the Buddha seems more monstrous to me, and more analogous to our current culture. Every decade I see more parallels. I see how incredibly modern the Buddha was in his self-absorption and his monomania and his hysterical inability to cope with the smallest concerns of life and living. I see the Buddha as a lastman, an even more complete specimen than Christ. I see the people around me becoming more zombie-like every decade, mirroring in some ways the zombie state of the Buddha. I see the same weakness in myself, and I see this weakness encouraged and nurtured by the society around me. But as I recognize it in the story of the Buddha, I recognize it in my own self, and I seek to root it out. I have no desire to be desireless. I have no desire to be the Buddha, or Buddha-like. If anything, I seek to be the anti-Buddha. I salute the Moon-devi and Mara himself, who, if he was an

enemy of the Buddha, must be worthy of my alliance.

Do not take this as Satanic, by any meaning of the word. I have no use for any of that, either. I only mean that the emotions, all of them, are our constant companions, and I embrace them. Passions are the engine of existence, and I would, if anything, work to *increase* my passions. I consider myself a bright angel, and for a bright angel there is no dark side. Anger is not dark. Sorrow is not dark. Hatred is not dark. All can be used. All are but various forms of light. Even death is not dark. Krishna was right: if you weren't meant to be here, you wouldn't be here. Those who are born are born for experience, not to avoid experience. If you were meant to avoid experience, you could do that very well in the quiet bosom of God. Because you are here, we must assume that Nature imagined she had some use for you here. You are like the little bird pushed from the nest by its mother, for its own good. If the baby bird sits on the ground refusing to fly, and only meditates on the warmth of its mother's feathers, we do not call that baby bird holy. We call him food for foxes.

*Buddhists will tell me to go to the Tripitaka instead of this "Life", but it would take me my whole life to analyze the Tripitaka like this. I am not here to argue about specifics, I am here to analyze the foundation. If the foundation is rotten, the building cannot be a good one.

THEATER OF THE ABSURD

by Miles Mathis

How is it that both sides of every debate fail to state the obvious these days? I have shown that both art and science are defined by misdirection and propaganda, so that we should not be surprised that politics is, too. Politics was the arena of invention for misdirection and propaganda, and art and science only borrowed their current forms from politics. The main remaining difference is that in art and science, the audience is assumed to have some residual intelligence: the misdirection has to be done behind a small cloak of some sort. But in politics, no such assumption is necessary anymore. The various media present us with a debate where both sides are speaking nothing but nonsense, and no one seems capable of passing through it.

Today's proof of this is the brouhaha over whether some Congresspeople were called niggers by individuals in a tea party rally. On one side we have the black Congresspeople themselves telling us it happened, and telling us that we need to "explore why this kind of divisive and reprehensible language is still making it into our political debate." On the other side, we have Andrew Breitbart saying that it never happened, and offering a reward to anyone who can prove it did.

Nonsense on both sides. To start with, seeing grown people afraid of printing a word as a word (not directed at anyone) is so infantile I never thought to see it in my lifetime. We think we have made great social progress because we can now say "crap" and "ass" on TV, but we have actually digressed since the 60's. Back then coarse language was frowned upon, but we were further from outlawing words than we are now. We are just a slight cough away from criminalizing the word nigger as hate speech, even when it is used like I am using it (undirected at anyone). This would be like outlawing the word "murder," even in reportage. Because murder is a crime, you cannot use the word, since it might incite someone to murder. The current arguments are about that logical. We have already reached that point in airports, where you can already be arrested just for saying the word "terrorist." For instance, if you said to a guard, "I am not a TERRORIST," and said the word terrorist with too much emphasis or volume, you would be arrested. Speech, words, and even inflection have already been criminalized, even when there is no threat or chance of riot or incitement.

But to move on. The Congressman's argument about divisive language is also nonsense. The "divisive language" didn't make it into "our political debate." A couple of people venting in a crowd is not a political debate. You are never going to be able to prevent people from shouting at each other, especially people who aren't capable of rational discourse. Since this describes most people on both sides of this and every other issue, this is the sort of thing we can expect. But it isn't important anyway. People who are pushed by the government are going to say angry things, and representatives should be able to take it. Anyone over 5 should be able to take it, since we are taught in kindergarten that sticks

and stones, etc.

In situations like this the word “nigger” is now just a variant of “asshole,” and you can't outlaw words. Unlike Breitbart, I have no doubt some people did use the word nigger, but they were probably just looking for the most hurtful word they could find. If it had been Barney Frank, they would have called him a faggot. That is, the word was used because it was handy. And because it has been put off limits, the word has only gained in its power. The recipient has told you beforehand that he will be highly offended, so if you want to be offensive, you know where to go. The whole scene is from the theater of the absurd. If blacks really want the word nigger to lose its heat, they shouldn't outlaw it, they should use it in every sentence. As in, “Tell that nigger Miley Cyrus to nigger my nigger.” Or, “Spongebob is a nigger-deluxe and a terrorist-hugging twink.” Or, “I can't decide if Grover or Elmo is the biggest nigger. One thing for sure: the Cookie Monster is a faggot-terrorist in a blue rug!” If you read enough sentences like that, you lose your ability to take these slurs seriously: the childishness of it all becomes very apparent. Richard Pryor was on the right track in the early years, and only his meetings with Jesse Jackson or somebody convinced him that outlawing words was the way to go.

If anyone had any logic left, he or she would see that Breitbart's calling these guys liars was more important than anyone calling them niggers. There is more meat there. Judging someone for the color of his skin is ridiculous on the face of it, and most people recognize that these days. But judging someone for his truthfulness is still both logical and poignant. Which makes it that much more amusing when these Congresspeople fail to take umbrage at being called liars. They are so used to lying that being called a liar no longer seems like a slur. When someone judges them for their character, they let it slide; but when someone judges them for the color of their nose and ears, oh, that is the limit!

Like I said, I suspect these guys weren't lying when they claimed they were called niggers. However, I do think they were misdirecting, since that is what they are paid to do. They (along with all white members of Congress and the media) are trying with every card they can play to keep the “debate” away from the real issues. They are trying to keep us arguing about forbidden words and the color of our noses, so that we forget to argue about real policy. They want the headlines to constantly be about race or sex or abortion or who fell into a mine or who slept with who, so that they don't ever have to answer the hard questions about how much the Federal Reserve stole from us this year, or how many innocent people they have killed in the Middle East in illegal wars, or how they are continuing to cover up 911, or how Homeland Security is expanding into a Gestapo, or how the Constitution is evaporating from beginning to end.

In fact, any news story that includes Congress is misdirection from the get-go, since Congress is just a cardboard front. It is a cast of marginalized characters paid to look like it is doing something, so that you can send them letters they can throw in the shredder. You might as well petition the cast of *Lost* to do something about healthcare or foreign policy. You might as well gather and protest in front of Duncan Donuts or Chuck-E-Cheese. Congress is obsolescent. It is defunct. It is nothing but a professor emeritus, collecting a pension for filling a suit and having gray hair.

Congress shouldn't be worried about about a few harsh words. Congress should be worried that it has been hired to be the fake bad guy. Congress should be worried that when this really gets nasty, they are going to be the high profile villains. The rank and file have proved that they don't know who the enemy is, so it looks like they will go after the puppets first. Although Congress now just rubberstamps the policies made by other people, the angry citizens don't know that. The citizens still go to DC when they are angry and gather among the monuments, not realizing that DC is just a paper moon in front of a cardboard sea. It is a Disneyland of false targets, meant to attract the ignorant shooters. The real villains are in more secluded places, hiding behind layers of protection. The top brass have rows and rows of infantry and cavalry in front of them, and you can't even see them from the trenches.

You have to understand that the first line of defense for these people, well ahead of any line of pawns or privates, is the fake debate you read every day in the paper or online. You read some manufactured contest between two manufactured interests, not realizing that both interests are funded and scripted by the same people. In this particular case, Andrew Breitbart and these Congressmen are like two NFL teams, both paid by advertisers to knock heads for a few hours to keep your eyes off the main action. Any time you spend being offended by the fact that some nameless person yelled the word nigger is time you don't spend thinking about how the Feds just stole trillions from you, or how they stole these trillions to kill Iraqi and Afghani men, women and children in your name. It is time you don't spend thinking how your government, using money it stole from you, has become the worldwide leader in foreign and domestic terror, killing, torturing, jailing, and harassing anyone it wants to, including you and your neighbors. It is time you don't spend thinking about how it is even now hiring more thugs to make up more Blackwater-type private battalions that can bust into your home at gunpoint and charge you with anything they like, or shoot you dead.

I am going to let that reminder hang on that crescendo and move on to another topic. There were two subjects in today's headlines I wanted to hit, the other one being Sandra Bullock's marital problems. Here again, no sense is ever spoken in the media. The gender feminists have used this as one more bomb to drop on all men. I watched *Saturday Night Live* on Hulu last night, and this topic made Weekend Update on two occasions. First, Kristen Wiig flashed a T-shirt and a handsign in support of Bullock, then Tina Fey used the subject as a quick lead-in to a general slur of men. According to Fey, Bullock is not suffering from an Oscar curse, whereby the winner of a Best Actress Oscar then gets cheated on by her husband, she is suffering from the curse of "being a woman"—implying that all men cheat on their women (and that no women cheat on their men). This is patently absurd in general, and is so absurd in the case of Sandra Bullock that it passes belief. Sandra Bullock married a guy covered in tattoos, who works on choppers for a living, and who was married to a pornstar before her, and we are supposed to be shocked to discover he is not a choirboy? We are expected to feel loads of compassion for her, but what did she expect? It is like marrying a lion and being surprised when your pet lamb goes

missing or marrying a policeman and being surprised when your pet donut goes missing. C'mon. Make some sense, for criminy's sake!

Beyond that, it is ironic that Tina Fey chooses this same commentary to attack Bombshell McGee (Jesse James' new flame) for being tattooed, but never asks what Bullock was thinking in marrying someone who was the male equivalent of Bombshell McGee. If I married Bombshell McGee and then expected her to be a saint, I don't think Tina Fey, Kristen Wiig, or anyone else would feel a lot of solidarity with me. I don't think they would put my name on a T-shirt or flash me cutesy handsigns. They would think I was sleeping in a bed of my own making, wouldn't they—reaping what I did sow.

But it goes even beyond that. Sandra Bullock is known for being boy crazy. Nothing wrong with that, you will say. No, there isn't. There is nothing wrong with it, there is only something inconsistent in it. I lived in Austin in the 90's, and I saw Sandra around town quite often. She was always dating some new guy, Matthew McConaughey or Bob Schneider or somebody (neither of whom were known for being one-woman guys). She shopped at the same Whole Foods as me, and she would check me out as I ground my own organic free-trade Peruvian coffee or bought a bag of four-dollar pears. Again, nothing wrong with that. I have been told I look a bit like McCon or Schneider or Donovan, so I guess I am her type. But frankly I had no interest in being one in a long line of blonde-haired eye candy on the arm of Sandra Bullock. It works both ways, you know. So you can see why I might be able to see through this newest Hollywood fiasco. Women who have a lot of high-profile boyfriends, and who seem to be most attracted to the least dependable of them, don't merit a lot of compassion when their relationships blow up.

But it goes even beyond *that*. I can't believe actors still attack each other (male or female) for their sex lives. Actors are the biggest bunch of sluts ever. They have a lot of opportunity and most take it. Nor is this just limited to actors. When I was in Austin, nearly everyone was a slut. That is why they were there. Austin and Boston were and are known as the two best places to be single and under 35. Every night is a new encounter, and it is rare anyone refuses an opportunity. Again, I am not critiquing anyone, just stating a fact. You make choices and you have to live with them. I am not criticizing Sandra for liking alpha males, since most girls would do the same in her position. I am just pointing out the hypocrisy of dating or marrying those guys and then being shocked when they act like alpha males. They are just doing their job, and if they weren't doing it, someone else would. You might as well be shocked that dogs bark or that birds fly or that politicians lie. That is what they do, and it is your fault for expecting otherwise.

If Sandra wants to get involved with those guys, that is her business. I am only enraged when Tina Fey uses Jesse James to slur all guys. I am enraged that no one thinks to mention that Sandra Bullock may have had some responsibility in all this. And I am enraged when women imply that they are any better than us when it comes to sex. They aren't. In some ways they are different than us: they have different problems and make different mistakes. But in general they are just as confused and just as selfish and just as irrational. I know: I have dated *a lot* of them.

As a sort of tack on, I can't resist commenting on the inconsistency shown in Tina Fey's sketch with Justin Bieber. Tina plays a teacher with a crush on her 16 year old student, and it is portrayed as all in good fun. Women, and society in general, needs to decide how it feels about this. The sketch was funny, but the mixed signals are NOT funny. People are in jail for this. Eighteen year old guys have been arrested for dating 16 year old girls, so it is not just a matter of mores or morals or funny taboos. It is a matter of law. Real teachers, of both sexes, have spent years in jail for this.

I can understand each side in this debate. There are arguments on both sides that make sense. Europe has chosen to pretty much give up on statutory rape. Sixteen year olds there can date whoever they want to. But here, 16 year olds are still locked up in little mating pens. They can date other 16 year olds or face real jail time. If we want to keep those laws, then it makes no sense to loosen the mores. It makes no sense to joke about it as if it is no big deal. We can't be strict and loose at the same time. We need to either be loose like Europe or strict like Saudi Arabia. It is the mixed signals that are the real tragedy and that cause the real problems.

I like Tina Fey in general. I think she is smart and funny and attractive and talented, and I think politically she is well-intentioned and often correct. However, she, like most contemporary females, is sending a lot of dangerous mixed signals, obviously without even realizing it. It used to be men that were applying the old double standard in their own favor, but now it is women doing it. Women want to be free to do anything they like, but they don't want to allow men to do the same thing. Tina is free to joke about a crush on a 16 year old boy, but can you imagine Fred Armisen doing a sketch where he joked about marrying Molly Quinn or Dakota Fanning? He'd be fired first, then ripped on every talk show, then visited by the FBI.

Men being selfish are losers and cads, but women being selfish are "empowered." Men act stupid and make mistakes, and they are dragged through the tabloid mud for months. Women act stupid and make mistakes, and everyone looks the other way. Every relationship disaster is assumed to be the fault of the man, and no one asks if the woman shares some responsibility. When Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman split, for instance, not one person asked if Nicole had anything to do with it. She was the victim from the first word, despite the fact that almost no one knew what had really happened. For myself, I assumed they were both gay or frigid, and had been paired by their handlers for that reason. After some amount of time, they got sick of looking at each other, and asked to be re-assigned. Talk about no-fault. And yet the tabloids spun it endlessly as some moral failing of Tom. Nicole went on Oprah every other week and looked shunned and shamed, but her act was even more unconvincing than Tom's jumping up and down on the sofa.

Same for Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston. Jennifer admitted making Brad wait nine months before they had sex. If that doesn't stop you in your tracks, nothing will. That was 1999 and we are talking about actors. Normal people in their 30's wait, what, three to five dates, if that. Actors normally wait three to five minutes. Nine months? One or both of these people is frigid, and I am assuming both. No normal

guy waits nine months for sex with his girlfriend. The most likely scenario is that Jennifer's hormones finally kicked in in her 30's, and Brad asked to be re-assigned to someone more gay or more frigid. Only problem with that theory is that it means Billy Bob Thornton's whole sex thing is also an act, but Billy Bob is a good actor. Or maybe BB just wore Angelina out. I don't frickin know, or care. The only thing I know is that Jennifer wasn't anyone's victim. Hollywood relationships, like most relationships, are a series of disasters or fakes, and no one is going to convince me that the male sex is the fall guy in all this.

If women want stable relationships, they have to marry stable guys (who do exist). Why don't they? Because women are human beings, and human beings crave excitement. Stability is (often) the opposite of excitement. Women, like men, want both excitement and stability, so they waffle between one and the other. If they have more opportunity, they waffle more. Why can't the eternal problem be stated in these straightforward terms? Why do we always have to see the man portrayed as the goat and the woman portrayed as the angel? Simple: it is the woman now painting the picture. Men almost never write about sexual politics and women almost always do. There is an *Oprah* magazine, but there is no David Letterman magazine or Jimmy Kimmel magazine. We have no club. *GQ* and *Esquire* don't waste any copy fighting the gender war: they are too busy publishing soft porn and trying to get laid by floozies. Since the rise of online porn, no one looks at *Playboy* anymore, and *Playboy* was never a clear voice in the gender wars anyway. About the closest thing we had to a recent salvo was Christopher Hitchens' article in *Vanity Fair*, accusing women of not being funny, but [I have already shown](#) how pathetic that was.

It is sad when the strongest, most manly voice on our side is Camille Paglia, but I don't know where she has been the last five years. I lost track of all that when I gave up on *Salon* and moved into the real meat and potatoes of Infowars. The world has changed and a lot of these places like *Salon* don't understand it. Either that, or they have been taken over by the CIA. Camille, like Gore Vidal and lot of my old heroes from the 90's, still takes the Democratic party seriously. Vidal said recently that Obama was very smart and never lied. Conclusion: Vidal died and has been replaced by a CIA pod. In the same way, Paglia still hadn't seen through the whole charade as late as 2009, so she either hit an intellectual wall or has been visited by the spooks. Even Nader signed onto that whole cap-and-trade nonsense for a while, indicating a complete loss of his faculties. The world is changing so fast these older generations can't keep up. They are still functioning in the corruption levels of the 90's, and like Chomsky, they can't see the exponential increase since 911. That was the dividing line, and most of those past 60 really can't seem to get a handle on 911. Without coming to terms with that, they can't get a read on anything since then.

This is important, because Paglia, who wrote *Sexual Personae*, should be saying what I am saying. Instead she is letting her readers lead her, with columns that are just answers to her letterbag. It is as if she can no longer find her own feet. Worst of all, she is still looking for apologies for Obama. After a year like 2009, no intelligent person should be unclear about what is really going on. The events of the last decade have demanded that social critics become ever more critical, but Paglia was more pointed in

the 90's.

It begins to appear that the next decade will not be a decade where we are led by intellectuals of any stripe. I can't say that discourages me. It is the populace that must rise up, and they are always led by their own. It will be Alex Jones and others like him that lead the *sans-culottes* of our own time. One only wonders where the similar counter-revolution in the gender wars will come from. What voice of non-partisan reason will rise up like Twain from the Mississippi boats, to tell these overreaching ladies to put their claws back in their gloves?

THE BUSINESS OF ART

by Miles Mathis

I just got a newsletter from American Legacy Fine Art, also known as ALFA. ALFA is a top realist gallery in Pasadena, California. I wound up on their mailing list after submitting some jpegs about a year ago. ALFA carries Jeremy Lipking, and I thought I might fit in there. Just as well I didn't fit in there, since I now know, from this newsletter, that I could *never* have fit in there.

This newsletter was sent “high priority” according to my inbox, whatever the hell that means. I found a large attachment to the newsletter, bursting my mailbox limit, in the form of a “business of art” article: hence, I suppose, the high priority. It was another of those advice-to-artists columns, probably snipped from *Southwest Art* magazine or *American Artist*, concerning how to succeed in the business of art. It began by announcing, in Stentorian tones, that artists must treat art like a business. They must expect to spend at least 50% of their working time on PR. That was in paragraph one. The first paragraph ended by claiming that “art is a business whose product just happens to be art.”

If you aren't sick yet, you aren't a real artist. I couldn't even get past that first paragraph without crawling out on the roof and petting my Muses down. Erato was in such a huff it took me nearly an hour to calm her, with that stroking of her yellow hair that only my hands can accomplish.

Yes, I knew after reading that last quoted sentence that I had nothing to learn from this self-proclaimed expert. The first thing to check whenever you run across an article like this is the byline. Who is imposing this good advice upon you? Is it someone you could admire, someone you hope to emulate, someone who will be thought of highly in centuries to come, by the literate and the wise? No, in fact it never is. It is always some ill-bred gallery flunkie or market whore, just back from the latest gathering of phonies.

These articles would be helpful only in the oddest of cases: say in the case that they were written by Damien Hirst or John Currin or Jenny Saville. At least then we would get a real account of how to sleep and marry and kiss and slurp your way to the top. But even then they wouldn't be helpful to real artists. They would be helpful only to the cleverest of the clever pretenders.

But of course people like that don't write shitty little business articles. Not because they are above money grubbing, but because they are above the need to publish such drivel. They don't need the hundred bucks you earn by giving business advice to downmarket morons.

What you get in these shallow articles is not advice on how to sleep your way to the very top; no, you only get advice on how to suck your way to a mid-level sinecure. “How to say the right things, paint the right things, and think the right things.” Translated: “How to be a zombie and a tool of the Zombies.” Not advice for those with a crushing ambition and no scruples, only advice for those with

low expectations and no scruples. Other fields have the same sorts of articles: no doubt the fast food field has authors of similar articles on how to climb the ladder in a McDonald's franchise. "How to Graduate from Fry-Cook to Assistant Manager." Yes, you too can aspire to such heights, if you only learn a few rules of business!

There may be more potential money in art than in grease cooking, but I am no longer certain there is more elevation. Those who have succeeded, by the definition of success implied by all these articles, are those who have capitulated most fully to the market and all its vulgarities. So the advice they have for you is to do as they did: socialize, socialize, socialize, and never deign to notice for an instant that anything is beneath you, either in action or statement or intention or thought. If it is required by the rules of the market, do it, and do it with the greatest amount of ill grace, thoughtlessness, and impudence you can muster. Above all, judge everything in terms of cash. If it leads to cash, it is good; if it leads away from cash, it is bad.

For the truth is, that 50% figure is way too low. Those who succeed in art spend almost all their time on PR, and those who succeed the most have the greatest percentage. In realism, the top "artists" spend over 90% of their time on PR. Think of Thomas Kinkade or Pino. And in the avant garde—which is, as a field, exponentially more successful financially—the artists must spend at least 99% of their time on PR, since the artifacts can be found or excreted in a matter of seconds.

Now, depending on who you are, you can learn one of two lessons from this. If you want to make a lot of money, you would be best advised to do it outside the field of art, since your odds of making great piles of money in art are low. If you must make your pile in art, you would be best advised to do it from the gallery end, since, again, the odds are in that direction. There is a lot more money in selling than in production. Which means that if you are a producer of art and you are producing art mainly from the desire to make money, we can only call you a confused person. Not to mince terms, you are a fool. You are just the sort of idiot that reads articles about succeeding in the art market and takes them seriously. You are so unbelievably stupid that you cannot see that these articles are just one more piece in the propaganda machine put out by the galleries to condition you to do what they tell you. Think about it: you get a newsletter from a gallery telling you to do all their work for them, to do lots of promotion that they can use for free, to kiss their asses first and then everyone else's second, to give percentages to everyone you meet, including the man who starches your shirts. Is that not the least bit fishy? Do little bells not go off in your head?

Aren't you paying the galleries at least 50% to do PR? Why should you spend 50%-99% of your time doing PR, and then pay them for it? In addition, you are paying them to do the business side of art. Why should you be expected to do it yourself on top of that? It is like hiring an accountant and then getting a newsletter from your accountant telling you that you should spend 50% of your time doing accounting, telling you to always think of your work in terms of their accounting. It is so asinine it passes belief.

But these are the sort of people that now inhabit the arts. They are not only immune to all artistic feeling, they are immune to all logic and reason. They also happen to be immune to grammar (see just below). After being dumbfounded by that newsletter, I went back to the ALFA website, to see who these people really were. I should have done that a year ago before I sent the jpegs, but I still tend to be overwhelmed by naïve hope. The director of the gallery, Elaine Adams, is the wife of Peter Adams, and the gallery is built around his work. I will refrain from commenting on his work, letting this scan from his pages stand as all that needs to be said:



As for Elaine Adams, according to her bio on the site, she is a committee and board type of person, involved with various LA environs arts councils as well as the ASOPA board. She was named one the five most notable women in the arts by *Southwest Art* magazine. I now know enough to see all those things as big red flags. But the funniest thing is the first sentence of her bio, which ends, “to provide a unique and personal approach to servicing artists and gallery clients.” Only hookers “service” their clients. Everyone else, we hope, “serves” their clients.

I mention this as tonic to the sea of criticism leveled at artists and the way we do things. These articles on the business of art always lampoon artists for their business disabilities: for their inability to write a cover letter, for their inability to chitchat at parties, for their inability to remember names, and so on. We have our short suits, no question, and many artists are a patchwork of short suits. But if artists are sometimes pathetic, gallery people are, quite often, despicable. Artists at least know their business,

which is not selling, it is art. Real artists have a depth and a reality, lying hidden, it may be, under that layer of social unease. But many gallery people have nothing. They are a plastic surface with nothing underneath. And they don't even know their own business. The majority are piss-poor at sales, they write cover letters, bios, and brochures no better than your average 8th grader, they have no idea how to reach a better clientele, and their connections are always to other vulgar and clueless people who wouldn't know a work of art if it climbed in their shorts. If these gallery people know art, why are all their galleries full of hackwork and fake art? Why can't they seem to locate or sell a real work of art?

I will tell you why. It is because they can't judge people. We artists are not paying them to judge art. If they could judge art, they would be artists, and they wouldn't need to be sitting in a gallery talking on the phone all day. But we would like them to be able to judge people. That is what selling is all about in any case, isn't it? In the first instance, they can't judge people because they can't tell a real artist from a fake artist. They are impressed by a bunch of empty talk, and will sign a new artist based on patter and smiles and certificates. And they will dismiss an artist based on a spot on his shirt or a bad pair of shoes or a clumsy word. That is a failure of people skills, and the failure is not to the artist, it is to the seller. The seller of art should be able to spot real artists, and it is known by every child that real artists are often or always anti-social and airy and obtuse and oblique. A salesman who judges an artist by his shoes or his words is like a Jaguar car dealer who judges a client by his coat. Rich people, like artists, are eccentric, and you can't assume that the man with the ratty coat is a bum. He may be Howard Hughes. The man with the bad toupee may be Donald Trump. Likewise, the man with the sad eyes and the tight tongue may be the next Michelangelo or Van Gogh.

In the second instance, these gallery people cannot judge people because they cannot judge their clients. They appear to think that rich people buy art to be democrats, but rich people have always bought art to show that they are rich people. Yes, they want to be seen spending money, but they can do that anywhere. With art, they are buying the appearance of prestige, which is the opposite of democracy. They do not want to be the same as everyone else, since everyone else is not buying expensive art.

For this reason, the democratization of realism is self-defeating. The democratization of the avant-garde is also self-defeating in the long run, but we won't get into that here. Suffice it to say that the avant-garde has counter-measures to this that realism does not have. Realism cannot weather this inexorable dumbing down of subject matter and mood and technique because, once the level of art has reached the level of the poster shop, there is nothing to justify the price difference. Once there is no difference in quality, there is no possible difference in prestige, which means the rich will no longer be buying anything they need.

The galleries don't appear to see this for the approaching disaster it is. As the clients get more vulgar, the gallery follows them down. This is ultimately a failure to judge the client, on the part of the seller, because the seller cannot allow his product to be watered down past all sale. The seller thinks it is best to follow the client down, and to even accelerate his descent. But it would be better to push the client

up. Just as it is misjudging children to assume they want to be left without discipline, to wallow in their messes, it is misjudging adults to assume they want to be left alone of further education, to wallow in the artistic decline of their homes. Once their homes can no longer be distinguished from Walmart, they will no longer bother to decorate them.

What does this mean for the real artist? I stated above that there were two lessons to learn from all this, but only shared the lesson learned by those who want money. What of those who want art? If you got into the field of art to create real art, then advice from non-artists and fake artists will not help you. You don't need advice from business people. You may need to hire business people to sell your art, but you can tell them to stuff all their advice. When they start sending you articles telling you that you are "in a business whose product just happens to be art," you can tell them to take a fucking hike, because that is just proof they are grooming you for a pay cut. As I said, you need to learn to see through this propaganda. It is war being waged by the gallery against the artist, and it stinks, frankly.

Their job is to sell the art and your job is to create it. If you can create beautiful art, you should not have to push all the right buttons to get a gallery to look at it. Beautiful art is still very rare, and the competition is not that fierce. There is nothing but room at the top right now. Therefore, it is the gallery's responsibility to look at your art and recognize it for what it is. If they can't do that, then no amount of cover letters and brochures and business cards and ass kissing is going to make any difference. It is your job to be talented and their job to recognize talent. You cannot do both. You cannot create the work, recognize it, promote it, and sell it. Or, if you can, you certainly don't need a gallery to take 50% for criticizing your shoes and your haircut and that silly hat you love to wear.

Mia with Cameo



oil
28 x 42 in.

A Review of John Carey's *What Good are the Arts?*



by Miles Mathis (2005)

Like those insects it is impossible to extract from the orifice they inhabit,
there is no way of dislodging the fool from his folly. —*Ortega y Gasset*

John Carey is a 71 year-old professor emeritus of English literature at Oxford and the chief art critic at the *Sunday Times* in London. His book *What Good are the Arts?* is coming out next week (June 2) in the UK. As a bit of advance publicity, Mr. Carey published a gloss of the main argument of the book in this week's *Sunday Times*. It is this gloss I will address here. It would take another book to address all the non-distinctions in his book; here I can just about match the length of his gloss in destroying it. Since Mr. Carey wrote the gloss of the book himself, the destruction of the gloss is as good as the destruction of the book, which is what I hope to achieve

Until now, Mr. Carey has stayed beneath my radar. That is to say, his opinions have not inconvenienced me in any appreciable way. Now, however, it is claimed that this new book will cause a major row, at least in the arts in Britain. That is yet to be seen. Nor am I convinced that a major row among the current players in the visual arts scene, in Britain or elsewhere, is of much concern to art history. However, it being a slow week for me, I thought I would pre-empt the row with a few coldwater observations. Mr. Carey preens himself on being a bottom-liner, a brass-and-tacks sort of writer in the tradition of Orwell. I say I can do him one better. That is reason enough for getting involved.

I was recommended to the article by an English artist who told me of Mr. Carey's local reputation as someone who had taken on the arts establishment and yet still managed to be a major player in it. Needless to say, I was skeptical. That combination has been rare in history and is all but impossible now. I predicted to myself that Mr. Carey had taken some stance that, while appearing to be slightly

extravagant at first, was actually only a subtle variation of the status quo. Decide for yourself how accurate I was.

Mr. Carey has made his loaf by attacking artistic snobbery. In short, he is a fierce anti-elitist, the ally of the common man and the common sensibility. Before I address the specifics of his argument, I would like to remind the reader that being an anti-elitist in modern society is not exactly a risky move, even for Oxford dons. It could hardly be seen as swimming against any tide. In fact, everyone knows that anti-elitism *is* the tide. Mr. Carey could not be more establishment if he tried. This is doubly and trebly true in the arts. The worldwide establishment in the arts is anti-elitist, and has been for at least 80 years. So I am mystified to know why Mr. Carey is seen to be fiercely independent, courageous, outnumbered, or any of the rest. He is not near any margin. He is very near the bullseye of modernist thought.

One supposes it is because he is reckless enough to attack the modern centers of power Immanuel Kant and Jeannette Winterson. Yes, he has really put his head on the block there. It is yet to be seen if he can escape the fury of their replies.

I mean no slight against Ms. Winterson, whose work I like (I also like her *ideas* about art much more than Mr. Carey's). But surely no one can be deluded enough to think that Ms. Winterson is part of any establishment. Nor Iris Murdoch, another writer that Mr. Carey attacks. Murdoch and Winterson are certainly respected by many, but as far as their opinions on the definition of art go, they are much further toward the margins than Mr. Carey. It is they who have taken the risks, not him. They have managed to outrun these opinions, which are not very popular, due to the quality of their art. This is worth underlining, seeing that Mr. Carey cannot say the same. In my opinion, what we have in this case is a non-artist, Mr. Carey, arguing about art with artists. Mr. Carey is an analytical writer, which is not the same thing as a creative writer. Mr. Carey is a critic, which is not the same as an artist. One is an analyzer and the other is a synthesizer.

Of course Mr. Carey is at pains to hide this distinction. He is at some pains to hide all distinctions, it would appear. For example, he agrees with Arthur Danto that everything is art. Danto is one of the major players in the worldwide art establishment. If Mr. Carey were anti-establishment, we would expect him to disagree with the establishment, but, at least in this gloss, he never does. Mr. Carey falls into step with the *au courant* idea of pluralism, which is a fancy way of saying that a Brillo box or a train ticket or a can of excrement is art. This is Mr. Carey's courageous act of defining art, an act he leads us up to with foreshadowing and bravado. Readers of my "Lastman" article will remember that this is precisely the definition given by Louis Menand in the *New Yorker* in 1999, and even Mr. Menand was no bold inventor of definitions. This one has been around for decades. Arthur Danto claims it in one of his books, going back to 1964 to do so, but everyone with a clue knows that Duchamp beat him to it by a half century. This makes Mr. Carey about a century late in his claims to boldness.

Mr. Carey's main line of argument in the gloss is to show us some examples of snobbery or elitism in historical and contemporary art and then to flush the whole idea of high art with these examples. The

logic goes something like this: 1) Some artists and critics have been snobs, 2) Therefore art is based on elitism, 3) Therefore all art is called into question, 4) Therefore all distinctions in art are manufactured, 5) Therefore these distinctions should and must be jettisoned. Once again Mr. Carey is in the main line of reasoning in contemporary art and criticism. And once again I would think an intelligent reader must be stunned at the lack of sense in this line of “reasoning”. At least to me, it is astonishing that an Oxford don can be such a syllogistic fool. Mr. Carey elides over rules of logic like a schoolboy in kneepants. But one does not need to be a philosophy expert to see the holes in Mr. Carey’s argument. One would hope that even the common men Mr. Carey claims alliance with could see them. I happen to believe that logic, like art, is a field open to all, if not practiced by all. Anyone who cared to could see that Mr. Carey’s argument has no logic in it. It is a bumpy rush to a foregone conclusion, a conclusion chosen because it allied him directly to the power grid and allowed him to be hired by a mainstream newspaper.

When he is not flouting the rules of logic, Mr. Carey is putting the spin on so heavily that one might almost call it lying. For instance, he says, “Writers on the arts have emphasized that their spiritual benefits, though highly desirable, are not available to everyone.” Yes, some writers who are now seen as outdated by almost everyone may have said something like that in the distant past. But I don’t know any writers who are saying that now, and I would argue that the main line of art criticism has never said that. Once again, Mr. Carey fails to make very important distinctions. What the writers that Mr. Carey is talking about really said was closer to this: “The spiritual benefits of art, though available to everyone, will never be achieved by everyone equally, due to the very simple fact that many people will not take the time or effort to achieve those benefits.” I think even Flaubert would come closer to my quote than to Mr. Carey’s, and Flaubert was not the strongest believer in democracy. The question is not one of equal opportunity, it is one of equal achievement. The same might be said of any arena of human endeavor, from sport to art to the building of relationships. People arrive at different levels, due to their own choices and priorities. This is again common sense. But Mr. Carey prefers to give it a class warfare spin, since this sells copy at a much faster rate. He wants those who are artistically ignorant to think that they are being denied a human right to artistic brilliance.

Why does he want them to believe it? Why does he care so much about the artistically ignorant? Why has he made this alliance? It is very simple. In defending them he is defending himself. In most ways he is in an analogous situation. The artistically ignorant are demanding equal consideration as an unearned right. As an art critic, he is doing the same thing. He has not earned his place in the argument by producing great art, and he knows this. This is the primary fact of his “creative” existence. Only in a milieu in which all distinctions are thrown out can he hope to continue to be taken seriously.

Even beyond his status as a non-artist, it is very difficult to take someone seriously who would write this:

The assumption that high art puts you in touch with the “sacred”—that is, with something unassailably valuable that surmounts human concerns—carries with it a belittling of the merely human which, when transposed to the realm of international terrorism, promotes massacre.

Mr. Carey implies that art, simply by being hierarchical, contains the seeds of massacre. However, by making some commonsense distinctions we can easily diffuse this bomb. First distinction: Not everything that is “sacred” or “unassailably valuable” surmounts human concerns or belittles the merely human. In fact, the whole history of art contradicts this connection, though Mr. Carey tries very hard to make the connection seem absolute. Very many of the greatest art works in history have drawn a bold line from the sacred to the human. Painters and sculptors before the 20th century were always painters and sculptors of things, most often human things—people. Occasionally these people were painted or sculpted as gods or heroes, but even so their concerns did not surmount human concerns or belittle the human. All art, even the highest religious art, has been primarily about human concerns. The great historical religions all have their problems and I am not here to deny it, but to state that art and religion have or have tried to surmount human concerns is simply preposterous. Both were created mainly to *address* human concerns. What other concerns are there? Second distinction: Even if we look only at the most transcendental parts of the most transcendental religions and artworks, it is hard to assign violence to them categorically. Mr. Carey implies that chasing over-earths and paradises is more strongly linked to violence, personal and cultural, than other philosophies. This means, presumably, that to take art and religion away from man is to civilize him—to make him less violent. I can’t imagine that anyone seriously believes this, the common man least of all. The common man knows, like any man with his eyes open, that men are violent. If you take away their art and religion, they will invent other hierarchies to war over. Common men throughout history have lived without much art or religion, and yet they have gone to war like they were going to lunch. If you take all the wildebeest out of the Serengeti, will the lions start eating grass? No, they will find other prey or starve to death. Even herbivores and little birds battle over territory. If we diffuse art and religion, we will battle over territory or mates or politics or football. Take away football from young boys and they will rank themselves on shoe size or spitball contests. Take away clothes or jewelry or grades from teenage girls and they will rank themselves on the shape of their noses or how tan they are.

Mr. Carey again vastly overstates the case when he says this:

The fatal element in both [art and terrorism] is the ability to persuade yourself that other people — because of their low tastes or their lack of education or their racial or religious origins or their transformation into androids by the mass media — are not fully human, or not in the elevated sense that you are human yourself.

Here we are presented with the artist as a little Hitler, and we see once again how establishment Mr. Carey really is. According to him, an artist who thinks he knows more about art than people who know nothing about art must think that these people are “not fully human” and therefore ripe for extermination. It would be difficult to be more exclamatory or absurd. Let me state for the record that I think I know more about art than Mr. Carey, which means of course that I think know more than the people he is referring to in this paragraph—the people who have never studied art or painted anything or gone to museums or thought much about the subject at all. But I do not think they are sub-human; nor do I think they should be killed or maimed or even looked at in a funny way. They can pursue their interests and I can pursue mine. If they start claiming to be experts in my field, then yes, they will earn

my ire, but that is about the extent of it. I don't see how any common man could disagree with me. A man who knows a lot about model trains or Star Wars or cooking will also not like it when someone comes into his basement or kitchen and starts mouthing off indiscriminately. Nor will the Star Wars expert grant the title of expert to everyone who asks for it. There is *no* field in which status is automatically granted, and I don't understand why so many people seem to think that art is or should be equal time. It is equal opportunity, yes, but not everyone's opinions are due equal esteem. How, precisely, is that a fascist idea?

Even Mr. Carey's knowledge of art history is suspect, to say the least. He claims in this gloss that there was no idea of the artistic genius before the late 18th century. He assigns all the ills of hierarchical art to Baumgarten and Kant. I suggest he read Vasari, where Michelangelo and many others are praised as geniuses and demi-gods. The Greeks also esteemed their artists very highly, although Mr. Carey explicitly denies it. Perhaps he has not read the extravagant praise of Praxiteles and Phidias in many ancient texts. Or perhaps he just assumes that his readers have not.

Even more puzzling is Mr. Carey's claims that Kant's denial of the term "genius" to scientists like Newton has carried over to the present day:

Men of science, Kant stipulates — even highly intelligent ones like Sir Isaac Newton — do not deserve the name "genius", because they "merely follow rules", whereas artistic genius "discovers the new, and by a means that cannot be learnt or explained". It is strange that this farrago of superstition and unsubstantiated assertion should have achieved a position of dominance in western thought. Nevertheless, that is what occurred.

One can only wonder if Mr. Carey has ever heard of a little man named Einstein. It is nearly beyond belief that Mr. Carey is attacking his contemporaries based on what Kant said, especially when precisely no one agrees with Kant on this. I seriously doubt that any of the snobs that Mr. Carey purposes to hit has ever claimed that Newton or Einstein or any other famous scientists were "merely following rules." And even if they had, it is hardly to the point. Kant or Winterson or Murdoch saying false or disagreeable things, even if it were proved, does not merit throwing out all distinction in art.

If you take Mr. Carey's assertions to their logical conclusion, then you get a world in which even his anti-elitist column becomes impossible. If everyone's opinions on art are equal, then why should the *Times* give him space every month? Why not draw names out of a hat and give everyone a chance to write about art? What could be more elitist than the position of art critic?

Moreover, if Mr. Carey is so enchanted by the life of the common man, then why didn't he become a factory worker? His life would have been so much more interesting, relevant, realized and consistent if he had. At least Orwell (one of Mr. Carey's heroes, we are told) had a dose of this consistency. Orwell actually fled the donnish existence and did some manual labor and lived close to the bone. With Mr. Carey it is all armchair psychology.

It is said that Mr. Carey was bitter about the destruction of the grammar schools he went to, "schools that allowed talented children to escape from humble obscurity." What? If that isn't a contradiction of

his whole thesis, I don't know what would be. Why should anyone want to escape from the humble people? How can anyone be talented? Isn't talent a dangerous hierarchy that sows the seeds of destruction and threatens us with more 9/11's?

We are also told, in an accompanying article, that Carey "finds reviewing books 'addictive' on account of the large readership it grants him." In response, I will continue the quote from above, where Carey is talking about the fatal element in art and terrorism. The next sentence in the quote is this:

Of course, it is just this fatal element that makes the viewpoint so attractive. For it brings with it a wonderful sense of security. It assures you of your specialness. It inscribes you in the book of life, from which the nameless masses are excluded.

It is OK for Mr. Carey to feel special with his large readership, but it is not OK for painters or novelists or connoisseurs to feel special for their achievements. *We* are on the road to massacre and mass extermination, while *he* is just an ally of the common man.

In the accompanying article in the *Times*, Mr. Carey is said to have a great command of language and a rigor that is feared and envied by other critics. I have to admit that I saw none of that in his gloss. Only other critics could be cowed by such poor writing and thinking. Beyond that, I seriously doubt that a writer like Robert Hughes would be either envious or fearful of Mr. Carey. The only idea that had any beauty of conception or expression in Mr. Carey's article was his quote of Hughes on van Gogh. Everything else was frankly an awful mess, hardly better than Danto's drabbings in *The Nation*.

The next article is a follow-up to this one

The Greatest Irony

by Miles Mathis



In my response to John Carey's new book *What Good are the Arts?* the subject of the "common man" was a central concern. Neither he nor I were very precise in our definition of the common man. Some contemporary writers have called this statistical or theoretical person the man on the street, others have created a group called the masses. In the recent past the common man has been given both to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This paper is not about a precise definition, but I do want to fine-tune my grouping a bit before I get started.

Mr. Carey and his biographers take some pains to remind us that he grew up working class. This is only partly to the point, since we are not told if he ever held any jobs that were working class. He may have outgrown his “humble” origins by the time he was 18, graduating directly into the privileged existence he now has, where he can keep bees and ice-dance and, one supposes, drink expensive sherry.

I did not grow up in the slums or even the factories. My parents were and are white-collar (accountants) and we were even members of the country club in my little town in North Texas. But I have held quite a few jobs that were not white collar—that were very working class. In fact I consider my current profession to be blue-collar since I don't work in an office—I work with my hands and produce things directly.

I have waited tables, done light construction, done petty clerical work, watered plants in a tree nursery, bagged groceries, been a disc jockey, dusted pictures in a gallery, and so on. Even after I began selling paintings, I never existed in any rarefied atmosphere (except when I created it myself). I have never been set up at a university or a company or a consortium or any other group. For the most part, the people I have talked to and interacted with have been “common people.” Meaning that they were not rich or powerful, they did not have exciting jobs, they were not from any cultural elite. And even in the few instances that they were, they did not have extensive educations in art. They had a common American art education, which is to say, almost no education at all. Being who I am, I talked art with most or all of them anyway. I still talk art with almost everyone I meet, and almost all of them are common people when it comes to art. Most rich and privileged people are common people when it comes to art, since their money or other elevation did not come from the field of art. Most of them, rich or poor, educated or not, don’t know much about art and admit it cheerfully. For the most part it is because they just aren’t too interested. They tell me what they like and I tell them what I like, and beyond that there isn’t much to say, since if I go off their eyes glaze over and I quickly realize I am boring the pants off them.

What all this means is that I have some experience with what Mr. Carey calls the common person, maybe more than he does. I have hung out in the pool halls and all-night diners and shady bars, the truckstop coffeeshops and foodcourts at the mall and the loud danceclubs. I have some respect for the people there, but no more than they deserve. I don’t glorify them. I don’t think they are especially pure or vital or any of that. Some of them are, most of them aren’t, just like anywhere. But one thing I have discovered that may shock Mr. Carey is that these common people don’t agree with him about art. That is the greatest irony. He has allied himself to a people and thinks he is taking their part in some debate, when in fact he is simply making himself look foolish, *especially* to them. For the fact is that most people who are not “in the arts” in some monetary way don’t like Modernism or the avant garde or the trend by any other name. Not only that, but they don’t want to call a can of excrement art. They do not feel like they are being granted any creative freedoms by being able to call excrement art. They feel the same way about train tickets and Brillo boxes and commodes and all the rest. They really don’t see how they can benefit from the death of art or from its illogical infinite expansion. If anything they are a bit nostalgic. If they are going to take the time to look at art, they would just as soon look at something impressive, like the *David* or *The Birth of Venus*. Not one of the common people wants the hierarchy of art to be dismantled, because if they are impressed by anything it is this hierarchy. If artists aren’t going to show them great things, they would just as soon go to the movies, where the directors will give them hierarchies in spades.

In my experience, the people who like to talk about modernism and postmodernism and the avant garde and poststructuralism and all the rest are not common people but what one might call mid-level intellectuals. People who have just enough cultural education to turn them into blithering idiots. They have taken a course on 20th century art or on the Bauhaus or on Derrida or something and they are now flush with new-found power. They have discovered the key to the inner sanctum. They rush home to psychoanalyze the children and to redecorate the doghouse in primary colors. Some of these people subsequently get a lot more “education.” They read lots of recent books with lots of pictures in

them and memorize a vast list of names. But none of it does them any good. They can better browbeat the common people who haven't read these ridiculous books, but they have not found any wisdom. They have only found critical elevation. This elevation allows them to see clearly the artists below them who are working away grubbily. The most ambitious among them become critics or museum directors, and they can lecture to artists on art. Not one of them has the intellectual honesty to see how ridiculous this is, but the common people do.

The common people think it is all a great joke. Art is not their sacred cow. If the artists will not entertain them with art, then sometimes it is worth a chuckle or two to see a group of fools biting their own butts and scratching in public and drooling. It is like watching *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or like going to the circus back in the '20's: "Come see the Freaks! Pay a dime and see the rich and privileged people acting like cretins! They will say anything no matter how asinine! Step right up! An Oxford don who thinks shit is art. Step right up! Freakish behavior! Compost in a museum! What will they do next folks? Look, the rich man is paying \$20 million for a cigarette butt! Beautiful. You get your dime's worth here, ladies and gentlemen! I couldn't script it better myself!"

And the rich man and the Oxford don keep posing and primping and scratching, with one eye to the public. They love the attention. They could never draw a crowd any other way. They have no talents beyond being freaks. How could they ever have existed before the circus came to town? And the show is even richer for them, for look, across the way. The doors of the old museum have closed. The crowds are all here, laughing and pointing. The Punch and Judy show has bankrupted the opera house. Joy of joys! All is accomplished. And the rich man and the Oxford don smile at each other. "We have won," they say to themselves. "The artists have left town and the crowd is forever ours! Just think of the money we will make. Now if we can just get rid of those elitist Jewish bastards in Hollywood. Those old-world hierarchists selling that horrible kitsch."

It is never the common people who say this. It is never the common people who want everything watered down and mediocritized and squashed into a strict egalitarianism. The philosophy of non-distinction always comes from the political specialists at the university—the art history experts and cultural studies experts. And it comes from the institutions that these experts seed—the museums and foundations and cultural centers.

The common people have never been that impressed by equal achievement. They like equal opportunity of course, what unprivileged person wouldn't? But the whole point of democracy and *egalite* was for them not mainly to pull the lords down but to raise the lower classes. It may be a temporary thrill to see the prince groveling in the mud at your side, but common people, like everyone else, are more selfish than that. The main point is for them to get into the castle and to sit in the plush chairs themselves and to drink the fine wines themselves and to wear the pretty clothes themselves. The prince can rot or not, but the common person is worried about his own hide, is concerned mainly about *elevating* himself.

This is because the common person is usually clever enough to see that equal opportunity is an empty ark unless there is some ladder to climb. Equal opportunity is not as much about equality as it is about *opportunity*. In that term, "equal" is just the adjective; "opportunity" is the important word—it is the *noun*. Consider this parable: "Everyone has just won a chance to climb to the top of the Empire State Building! No one is denied entry. Come see the beautiful view. You are close to the clouds and the eagles, close to the very gods! Climb as high as your lungs can take you. Oh the freedom. Oh the bliss." You can substitute the Eiffel Tower or Mount Ararat or Mt. Fuji for the Empire State building if you like.

And then you arrive with your ticket, only to find that the Empire State building or the holy mountain has been demolished overnight, and in its place is a two-story brownstone with an elevator. A sign on the front says that the mayor and the city council felt that many people would not have the lung capacity to make it to the top. It was unfair to them not to have an elevator. And besides, it is dangerous up there! Some people might jump. Others might get dizzy and faint. A few at least would get a queasy stomach. That is risky and unfair. And think of the lawsuits.

Suddenly your ticket isn't worth so much is it? You might ask why you killed off all the aristocrats for this. You could get a view from a second story window in the slums. And your dreams! You used to see the rich and polished man sitting up there in the clouds, eating his sweetmeats, and you thought, Ah, one day that could be me! I will climb that lofty tower and breath that fresh crisp air. I will have his library, I will know what he knows, I will impress the girls with my great knowledge and my high white collar and the world will swoon. I will have time to learn the violin, or to take up watercolors, or to learn polo by god.

All gone. The dreams of the ignorant masses gone. You may get rich, you ignorant plebe, but you will still be ignorant. Some of us in the world are capitalists and we will grant you your polo pony and your cars, if you are lucky. But the library and the violin and the watercolors and all that upperclass claptrap, forget it. That is just pretension. Theoretically, we can't allow it. And as for fresh air, get serious.

Well, OK, you can read books if you have to. But for heaven's sake don't pretend to learn anything. Collect facts only to further dismantle pretension and hierarchy. If you claim to know more about anything important than the most ignorant person you will be ostracized from the *fraternite*. We don't want anymore snobbish long-fingered lily-white effete atavisms. Oh, and don't use big words either, unless they were invented recently. That is just annoying.

I said earlier that I considered myself blue-collar. That was from no desire to ally myself to the common person or the workers or anyone else. I can fight my own battles, and the common people can agree with me or not, it won't change a thing. I don't need a thumbs-up from anyone with any collar or no collar. I am blue collar simply because I think I am closer to the dictionary definition and I like to state things the way they are. I don't honestly think I have a lot in common with "common people"

or with rich people or with anyone else. Art *is* my sacred cow, and that makes me an oddity these days, no matter what company I am keeping. I have a hard time respecting the critics and rich people and “educated” people who think it is poignant and progressive to call shit art. And I have a hard time respecting those of the masses who find amusement in watching art history deconstruct. The people who put sharks in tanks, the people who display sharks in tanks, the people who write about sharks in tanks, and the people who pay to see sharks in tanks are all about equally lost, in my estimation.

A dot of education to all the people above: a shark in a tank may be a bit fascinating, but it is not art. It is a science project. It should be a display at the aquarium, not the art museum. In fact, there are several displays at various aquariums and natural history museums around the world that are similar to Hirst’s display. There is a very good reason that the creators of these displays are not famous artists and are not getting paid millions. The reason is because they are not artists and because the work they did is not worth millions.

In conclusion, there is not an alliance between the avant garde and the masses. The Oxford don has almost no constituency among the common people. He made it up. The choir he is preaching to is mostly with him at the universities and in those uppity institutions that run the arts. It is made up, ironically, of privileged people. Privileged people who want more privilege without having to do anything to earn it. They want the field of art to be theirs, but they don’t want to have to paint or sculpt anything or learn to play an instrument or design a building or learn ballet or practice singing or write any decent novels or poems or even screenplays. They just want to administrate. With real artists around, that isn’t so easy, since real artists don’t like to take orders or be subordinate to self-appointed administrators. So the administrators have hired stand-ins. That is what all those Turner Prize people are. The administrators have taken the van down to the psychiatric ward, rounded up a few people who are still partially mobile, and glued their hands to various tinker-toy projects. Then the stand-ins can go on BBC2 and stutter and mumble and drool and it is great fun for everyone. Who needs Monty Python when we can get a belly laugh from these unfortunate wretches who are the poster people of the avant garde? What a big-hearted people we are, to be sure. After all, we *are* paying them to be our fools.

CHANNELING THOREAU AND TWAIN

by channeling George Carlin

by Miles Mathis

(circa2010)

What would Thoreau think? That is what keeps running through my head. Henry didn't think much of people and their "civilization," but as you look back, you see he didn't have much to complain about. Relatively speaking, there weren't many people and there wasn't much civilization. The population of Massachusetts is now almost 7 million. In Henry's time it was, what, half a million? Concord had a few thousand people, and was still in the country at that time. Even so, Henry felt squashed by his neighbors and had to run headlong into the woods to find some fresh air. But what got me thinking—and writing—is Henry's complaining in *Walden* about the laying of the international telegraph cables. England and the States could now converse instantly; but what, asked Henry, if England and the States had nothing important to say to one another? According to Henry, the last important piece of news out of England was from 1649 (when Charles lost his head, you know). So carpeting the ocean floor with cables was really no more than pollution: something else for the whales and octopi to trip over.

These days we have ten times as many people, but do we make ten times as much worthy news? Do we make *any* news worth reporting, by the strict standards of Henry? That is a question well worth asking, and one we never ask. More than that, we might look closer to home and ask if we really have anything terribly pressing to report to one another, day to day and person to person. Do we need iphones and blackberries and facebook and youtube and blogs and tweets and an ever growing list of apps? Or is it just a burgeoning pile of plastic pollution, for future worms and centipedes to trip over? It is said that society has become like a huge brain, and I agree: we have become a giant brain composed entirely of connections, of synapses between empty regions. We have become a communal brain that contains no useful information, only a compressed bundle of cables from point to point. To take just the most obvious example: ninety percent of the internet is porn, and the rest is pirated music, fake drugs, and CIA-approved propaganda. Is that really an information explosion, or it is more akin to a rupture? It is the international trivia champion preening himself that he is the world's smartest person. It is Wikipedia posing as wisdom.

What would Mark Twain think? That is the question you should put to yourself, the question you should write on the mirror in soap, the question you should put on a post-it on the frig, the question you should make your screensaver, the question you should make your ringtone. Mark Twain didn't think much of people and their *soi-disant* civilization, but as you look back, you see he didn't have much to complain about. The current population of Missouri is about 6 million. In Twain's time, it was, what, half a million? In all the 114 counties of Missouri, there was not one car, one phone, one airplane, one computer, one TV, one superfund site, or one agent of the CIA, FBI, ATF, FEMA, or IRS. Before the

civil war, there was no income tax, and after it the tax was 3%. Let us say your total taxes are now on the order of 50%: do you think it was worth the other 47% to buy what you now have? If a man came to your door offering to sell you a phone, a car, a TV, a computer, and a passel of federal agents for the price of those things *plus* half your yearly income, would you buy? What if this man also agreed to taint your water for free, poison your air, and inject all your food with chemicals? No? Well, what if he promised to sell you pills to address all your new afflictions caused by the taint, the poison, and the chemicals, for only another 15% of your income? No? Well, what if he promised to use your taxes to murder and enslave millions of people all over the world, so that you could spend a bit less for your sneakers and your tainted food and gas for your car? No? Well, what if he promised to create a pile of garbage the size of Texas in the mid-Pacific, for your amusement? What if he promised to kill half the species on Earth, as a pleasant *divertissement*? What if he promised to fell half the old forests of the world, and send you a few splinters for your coffee table? What if he promised to give all your children dark circles under their eyes, as a token of their compromised immune systems? What if he promised to take your newborns right out of your arms in the hospital, slice open their feet, mutilate their genitals, secretly catalog their DNA, and immediately pump them full of chemicals, including mercury and industrial-waste fluoride? This last for a mere few thousand dollars extra? The deal just keeps getting sweeter, right?

But I will be told we have made real progress: women can not only vote, they can now watch the Vagina Monologues and collect cats. Ah yes, everything changed in 1920, didn't it? It is like a dividing line of history. Women, with only their votes, stopped all the wars and generally turned the world into a paradise. It is proof of both the power of women and the power of the vote.

I don't mean to pick on women. I only mean to point out that they are just as deluded as men. Yes, women are equal to men and men are equal to women: they both generally haven't got a sliver of a clue about anything. Woman's intuition is worth precisely as much as man's intuition: nothing. If human beings really had an intuitive faculty that was functioning on even a vestigial level, we might have avoided the current mess. But they don't. Intuition would allow individuals without much intelligence or power of reasoning to do the right thing anyway, as it allows very stupid pigeons to fly in the right direction most of the time, and as it allows very unthinking plants to grow toward the Sun. But we just don't see this with humans and it is best to admit it. Giving women the vote fooled women just as it had men: it made them think they were more powerful, which made them more easy to control. They were so busy patting themselves on the back for electing representatives and petitioning representatives and going to caucuses and writing letters that they forgot to notice that the "representatives" were just two parties of thieves, two families of mobsters. In 90 years, women still haven't figured this out, and their intuition has been no help. Men are even more dense: they have had the vote for 234 years, and still haven't noticed that things get worse every year. Men and women both campaign for the leaders that pump their babies full of poisons, and they both put signs in their front yards and on their cars for these "representatives" who have sold them this new world of taint and chemicals and institutionalized suffering. This is a propaganda coup beyond anything Hitler ever dreamed of: it is like the Gestapo convincing Jews to gleefully wear Hitler gimme caps and T-shirts, and to scream "yes we can!" as they

straight-arm salute and goose-step toward Auschwitz.

But I will be told we have made real progress: the life-span has increased. Has it? Chief Seattle lived to be 86, without the help of Monsanto or DOW or Union Carbide or Pfizer, and he wasn't allergic to his tipi or his moccasins or his oak tree. If they hadn't forced him onto a reservation, he probably would have lived even longer. He was also over six feet tall. Our statistics are always pushed: yes, we are generally taller and more lively than a dead civil-war soldier, but that statistic doesn't mean much to me. When modern medicine can make me taller and livelier than Chief Seattle, I may take notice.

Even if I am forced to admit that we live longer than Jews in concentration camps, I may point out the possibility that the current Nazis have simply figured out that it is more profitable to keep the prisoners alive. It is more profitable to steal from long-lived victims than from short-lived ones. Smart parasites keep the host alive. The spider does not kill, it stuns. Only when the fly is incapable of providing further nourishment is its carcass tossed aside.

All your toys, your ipods and iphones and all their clever apps, are not signs of your freedom or your power. They are not signs of progress. They are methods of stunning. Every connection you have to the media is like an electrode physically implanted into your brain, preventing you from acting either logically or by any residual intuition. In a word, you ARE controlled. Do not fear the future: the controllers do not require implanted computer chips or stronger drugs or HAARP waves or unmanned police blimps. The program is already nearly perfect. It was already nearly perfect a century ago. These horror stories of chips and waves and blimps and so on are just planted stories, planted to make you think the problem lies in the future, with something they *may* do. If you are worried about future legislation, you forget to remember all the legislation of the last hundred years.

In fact, the problem is not that the program is getting more sophisticated, but that it is losing its sophistication. Fifty years ago, the population was controlled with so much more finesse, so much less effort and cost. Even Hitler is misunderstood. It is not the sophistication of the German Nazis that stands out, but their lack of it. During the entire 20th century, the US was controlled at much greater levels and to much greater extents than Germany ever was, and the proof of that is in the fact that no one knows it. The most powerful hand is the most invisible hand, and until recently the US hand was much quicker than the eye. Only recently has the hand slowed down to where the eye can follow it. From 1910 to 1980, say, the hand move so quickly and so fluidly that almost no one knew it was there. No one even posed the right questions. The rebels weren't even rebelling against the right things. The malcontents didn't know the source. And the masses genuinely thought they were free. If you had told a person in the '30's that the Great Depression was done on purpose, for instance, he would not have believed you, even if he were an intellectual, a communist, or an anarchist. He would have most likely used the Great Depression as a sign capitalism didn't work, and made some long-winded philosophical argument for another form of government. He would not have seen that it was the ultimate working of capitalism, by design; nor would he have imagined that such a scheme could just have easily have been hatched under the auspices of communism or any other ism. He would not have seen that it is not the

form of government that matters, as much as the *extent* of government. To this day, most revolutionaries think a change of form is required, when in fact the form is nearly beside the point. You could create a successful form of government with a porpoise pushing levers by chance in a large aquarium, as long as the extent of that government was limited to maintaining roads and hanging highwaymen.

As another example, if you had told someone in the 1950's that the "Great War" had been a new crime manufactured to hide previous crimes, he would not have believed you. Most people will not believe me now, despite the hand they can now see. The War was mainly a refattening of the fly, so that the spider could continue to dine. The Great Depression had so impoverished the general fly that there was nothing left to steal from him, no blood left to suck from his veins. What was required was a worldwide infusion, and war has always been the chosen way to bloody up a nation, in more ways than one. A lower population is always richer per capita, and one man can inseminate many women, so the loss of several million young men is little more than collateral damage. Plus, war is a money maker even without any casualties: things have to be bought to wage war, and not just bombs and tanks. People who will pay no more taxes for soup kitchens will pay more taxes to supply canteens and messhalls. People who will pay no more for bums' britches will pay more for soldiers' uniforms. With enough phony patriotism, you could milk taxes out of a rock.

By the 1960's, the control was complete. The entire decade was scripted so well the extras never suspected a thing. We had just enough fake revolution and conflict that it almost seemed real. Hollywood took over DC, and the real war in Vietnam deflected attention away from the fact that life at home had become little more than a movie, staged for one effect or another. Almost nothing you think happened in the '60's really happened, and that has been true ever since. TV supplies all the proof you have for everything you think you know, but, assuming you wanted to, how would you check that proof? It is rare that any evidence has been allowed to survive one way or another, but none of the fragments we do have support the given history. That is why more and more of these fragments disappear each year.

Older people will shout at me that they were there! Am I calling them liars? In many cases, yes, I am, since most of them have proved that is what they are. But to the other honest and well-intentioned people, I can only say this: Are you quite certain you were beyond fooling? Smart people are fooled all the time, at public events, in broad daylight, even when they are quite near the action. In assuming that your eyewitness account is worth anything, you are assuming that no one was intending to fool you. You are assuming that events unfolded naturally, with no intent to deceive. You are assuming that accidents were accidents and that everything was as it appeared to be. Do you really want to stand by that assumption? Do you really want to stand there and maintain that level of naivete, to this day? You are now, what, in your 70's? Do you really still believe that history is something that just happens? Do you really believe that the government is not capable of secrecy or of subterfuge or of planting information or of staging events?

But, as I said, errors were made. The hand became visible, which is why the control can no longer be so subtle. Many seem to think that 911 was done as an excuse for more control at home, but nothing could be further from the truth. 911 was done for two reasons: to propel foreign policy in the middle east and to get rid of unprofitable buildings. If the hand had remained invisible, there would have been no need to spend so much money turning it into an iron fist. It was much more efficient hidden by the white glove. A clueless populace does not have to be held down by force, which is why Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia and Mao's China lacked subtlety. You are not the only one that wants to return to the 70's: the hand would also like to return to the '70's, when it was nearly invisible. 911 was not the pretext for a police state, it was the cause of it. The curtain was pulled back, the mask was torn, and the audience looked back at the projectionist, realizing there was a little man in that room. The man can now maintain his anonymity only by building wider walls and firing on those who come too near.

As proof of this, you only have to consider the timeline. If the police state had been a desideratum of the invisible hand, you would have seen it building from the beginning. It would have been worse in 1970 than in 1960, and worse in 1990 than in 1980. But that is not what we see. Even the Bush neocons had no need of a police state, or they would have begun installing it in 2001. No, we don't see it until after 911, and if 911 had gone as planned, we still wouldn't see it. We wouldn't see it because we wouldn't need it.

We are told by conspiracy theorists that 911 is the best thing that ever happened to the hand, since it allowed all sorts of new strangleholds, but the opposite is true. 911 is the worst thing that ever happened to the hand, since the old black magic no longer works. Why do you think the hand picked a black man to be President? It was hoping a better front man with a better patter—a man no one would expect to be a face of The Man—would cause the audience to forget the curtain and the torn mask and so on. But it didn't work. That is why we have seen all the profit taking in the past year: it looks like the perpetual con may be ending, and all the existing chips have to be vacuumed from the table. In other words, steal while the stealing is still possible.

But I think the hand may be unnecessarily panicked. It requires neither a police state nor a binging at the table before the apocalypse. The majority of the audience has already made it clear that it has no desire to revolt, even knowing what it knows. It desires to be re-hypnotized into an easy forgetting. It will be led back to the 90's with little effort, since, compared to the present, that now seems an idyll. Most people do not really care whether history is true or false, even their own history, even their own memories. They do not care whether the Pacific Ocean is filled rim to rim with garbage, as long as they have a chlorinated pool to swim in. They do not care if the Amazonian rainforests are burned to the last twig, as long as they have a plastic Christmas tree they can erect in the living room. They do not care if their children are stuck full of needles and mutilated and stuffed with chemicals, as long as the little dears are still able to stand upright and recite all the pledges and paternosters. They do not care if their food and water and air is poisoned, as long as the poison is laced with narcotics: they can then fall into a drowsy dream-state where they are full of pure intuition, good intentions, people of great hope and progress, just doing what Jesus would do, etc.

The Castle Minnewater, Bruges



oil, 14 x 22 in.

[return to 2006](#)

A Flamewar *with* Rob Howard

by Miles Mathis

Someone told me that I was the only clear defeat Rob Howard ever suffered in his web trolling, and I thought the simplest thing to do would be to publish the exchange and let each person decide for himself. These are the minutes of the fight, taken by me directly from Goodart (before I was denied further admission there).

Rob Howard is the owner/moderator of the Cennini website and forum. Soon after I first arrived at Goodart back in 2002, Rob got into a spat with Virgil Elliott, Fred Ross, and Paul deLorenzo, a spat that I believe is still going on. I recently heard from Virgil and he is apparently still on high alert at Cowdisley. Anyway, knowing nothing of Howard, I decided to take a look at Cennini and see what the fuss was about. The rest is pretty much self-explanatory.

The bait is set

MM: FYI at Goodart, I went to the Cennini forum, thinking to "duke it out" with Howard. But I looked at his work first and decided it wasn't really worth it. He doesn't appear to me to have a leg to stand on, in critiquing anyone. The posted work is not impressive. Beyond that his method of painting a portrait is absurdly pointless. There is more life in the photo he painted from, and I would sooner hang the photo on my wall than such a mechanically reproduced "painting." He just wants to be a bigshot, as was clear from his photo—looking all constipated. He should have been a modern instead of an illustrator, then he could be REALLY famous for nothing—like Hockney.

MM: I think I do have a right to judge Howard based on that video. A great artist would not waste his time trying to sell videos teaching people how to project and trace images, paint fast, and basically become hacks. Nor would he have developed the method in the first place. I say great artist, because only a great artist would possibly have the footing to criticize Virgil or Paul, or act like an expert to the extent Howard does. An artist's opinions are grounded in his work, and cannot possibly transcend it. That is, an artist only truly KNOWS to the extent he can DO. All the rest is an abstraction. I would never take advice from someone who could not paint better than I do. And neither would you.

MM: If someone wants to give me a URL where I can see more of Howard's work, I would be glad to see it. I searched the Cennini site, but found only the portrait demo, which I have already commented on, and a few illustrations from the gouache book. There was no link to his personal site, that I could find. I agree that he is a competent illustrator. And his offering of materials seems to be useful. Although it is one thing to be a salesman of materials and another to be an artist. It just seems to me from what I have seen and heard that his opinions far overreach his *oeuvre*. Even if he is a talented painter, that doesn't give him the right to be nasty. Some balanced criticism would be one thing; character assassination and bullying is another. That is my gripe about the critics. Many of them seem quite intelligent. But they have not earned their place in the argument. Howard may or may not be right about any number of things. But until he becomes a great painter, I don't see that he has any right to be such a bully, or a self-appointed critic. Criticism only makes sense from a better painter to a worse painter. It makes no sense for non-painters to criticize painters, or for illustrators to criticize painters, no matter how many copies of a book they have sold. And that whole spraying of oil thing is a technical trainwreck, on many levels. The last thing you want to do is spray oil on a painting. You should be keeping as much oil out of the painting as possible. Everybody knows that. Much of Howard's technical advice is suspect, at best.

The Bride is much more appealing than the demo, but I don't see that it is in any way superior to the paintings Howard likes to diss [the Classical Realists]. Its precision undercuts its expression. It shows competence but no virtuosity. If he is using big brushes it is only as a time saver. Nor does it have the otherworldly charm of a tight Bouguereau. Bouguereau is not actually very real at all, either like life or a photo. It is Bouguereau's little world, fairly sharply focused, yes, but more subtle, more beautiful, more innocent than life, where the light is always soft and the faces always full of emotion and charm. And where the composition has been simplified and stripped, with nothing extraneous, nothing hard. This painting (*The Bride*) looks TOO MUCH like life. We already have life, we do not need exact copies of it, anymore than we need slice-of-life sculptures littering our public places or modern installations throwing in our faces what we flee from in the newspapers and on TV. The moderns are right in this, at least—art is more than just mirroring. It was more than that for Raphael and Rembrandt, Sargent and Bouguereau. And if we can't achieve more than that, I think we have failed to be fully creative.

James Morton wrote: Rob has sent me a comment on this thread regarding his errant teaching methods using photographs. He wishes to let this forum know that he would be happy to have you take this debate to studioproducts.com where he can match wits with all his detractors:

MM: He can come here if he is such a tough guy. I don't give a damn how fast he is, or how clever, or how many out-of-print books he has. Painting is not a performance art. And I am not impressed with

his jokey style, and hot-air quips. I got past that sort of stuff in high-school. Anyone who sits around talking about how he has "perfect taste," over and over, when nobody asked in the first place, has got problems. Does he honestly think his paintings will survive him? I'd never even heard of the guy before this. Kinkaid has made a lot of money, too. That is hardly an argument for his quality. Howard wants us to come to his site, where, as the moderator, he can attach snide subtext to everything we say. I hardly see that as matching wits. If he wants to test his perfect taste, he can go to my site, look at the triptych, and then go open another bottle of bourbon.

MM: I have no problem with Rob using photos to create or teach. But projection or tracing is a different thing. I don't think a drawing can ever have any expression if the hand is not free to move as it wants. Not every deviation from "reality" is a mistake. A drawing can be so correct it is lifeless. A student can never learn to draw if he or she does not do so freehand—either from photos or from life, and preferably from life. As for the speed thing, I too draw and paint very quickly, but I do not think it matters. I have a student who paints much slower, but he may eat us all alive before it is all said and done. The work of art is all that matters—it is literally all that will be left in a few years. No one will know how long it took, or how many elves shared in its making.

The bait is taken

RH: Good grief. With all of this talk about me not knowing what I'm doing, you'd think that you'd be good enough to find out about what you are criticizing. In the online illustrated description of the spray method, I stated, in simple declarative sentences, that the projected image was HELD NEXT TO THE CANVAS!!! In other words. it was no more than hanging a same-size photo near the canvas...or a still life, human being, whatever. Also (and you don't have to buy the video for this because the info is supplied free, online) the projected image never touches the canvas. The reason for rear projection is to have the same size image next to the canvas. This is classical sight-size drawing. Even more to the point is that, not only does this method eschew tracing...you don't even lay down a preliminary drawing. No crutches like drawing or a tentative underpainting. It's working the high wire without a net and it takes a degree of confidence until you've mastered one or two. The method simply uses electricity and optics to do what any classically trained painter has been taught—throw the image out of focus and block it in. If you had taken time to read the short article all the way through, you would understand how far off base your comments are. Had you seen the instructional video (you appear to have a problem with people making books and videos to share their knowledge...or is it a problem you have with others making money?) you would see that this is a very sensible method based in proven classical methods—block in, keep the underlying edges soft, lightly lubricate the canvas, save the detail for last. Combine it with classically-approved sight-size and the only thing left to object to is either the medium used or the electricity. As for projecting images, the bulb on my opaque projector burned out three years ago and I keep meaning to replace it. As for the application of lots of oil, again you are speaking from a vacuum of knowledge. The spray medium has very little oil in it. The oil it uses is in

the paint itself. It is a volatile lubricant that evaporates, neither biting into the underlying layers nor leaving much a footprint of its own. All tests have shown that it is benign, neither strengthening the paint film nor weakening it. It is very different from 'oiling out' a canvas. Because of its nature it does not yellow or crack. You might want to investigate these matters further before commenting upon the rumor you heard of a rumor. The spray method is described in some detail in the demonstration section of the studioproducts.com website. It seems to have been clear to a number of readers and I hope, that once you read it, the method will be clear to you. There is nothing about it that goes against any precepts of classical realism...no tracing and certainly no dangerous alkyd mediums...

MM: I read it. I stand by my comments. [It is clear as day that all the student has to do is move the projected image over another foot, to where it is on the canvas, in which case he has completely obviated the need for that "crutch" drawing]. And what sort of person gives himself the moniker "swellman." A swollen man, I suppose.

RH [to Paul Delorenzo] My objection to Gammell was that, although he was a good scholar, he was so far outside the mainstream of normal human life and operated from an incomplete knowledge, that his methods were less than workable in a wide range of situations. Like C.G.Jung's demonstration of the increasing abstraction of the emperor's face as the coins were minted further and further from Rome, the incomplete teachings of Gerome, through Laparre and Royer, then through Gamell and then through Lack et al have been so far removed from the seminal source that they are abstractions of a method that is now taking on the aspect of myth.

If one is willing to devote some time to learning to read French, there are some books and manuscripts one can locate that describe the method of Gerome and the academicians in detail. There were also some spotty transcriptions of those methods written by American and British students who had studied at those 19th century ateliers and academies. Learning from them would sweep away much of the myth that currently swirls around the search for neo-neo-neo classical painting method.

RH: Ah, but Miles. I can paint better than you. Much, much better than you can. And I have done it for decades. But before you think that I'm crowing, do know that it's a gift from God and, as we all know, He is not equal in bestowing his blessings. Perhaps in a another life you will be the painter you wish to be. For now, just accept what few gifts He has granted you and be thankful for them. Evidently you have difficulty with anyone writing books or, quelle horreurs, using an electrically-powered video tape to disseminate information. It is obvious that you have never seen the tapes yet you feel competent to comment upon them. That doesn't lend much credence to the rest of your comments. However, I am pleased that you adhere to the methods you espouse because, frankly, I don't need the competition. If you want to swim with weights tied to your ankles, be my guest. We see that mentality in people who strap explosives to their bodies in order to be martyrs to a lost cause. All they actually do is become an abstraction on the sidewalk that needs to be hosed down

MM: **"swellmanr" wrote: No crutches like drawing...**

Interesting technique, where drawing is now a crutch, and not drawing is "a highwire act." I hear the tittle-tattle of a thousand old masters.

As for projecting images, the bulb on my opaque projector burned out three years ago...

It appears that your bulb burned out long before that.

As for the application of lots of oil, The spray medium has very little oil in it. All tests have shown that it is benign.

Yes, I'm sure your tests were extensive. Sort of like the tests Firestone did on its own tires.

See how fun that is? I love being a "moderator".

MM: Swollenman, you must not have been able to pull yourself away from the mirror long enough to use the browser, but my url again is www.mileswmathis.com. I recommend you go with your anti-depressants in hand. And hide the sharp knives. Note that I also write better, that I am better looking, younger, have a higher IQ, and lots more friends. That last is because I only browbeat bullies like you. But I really don't have time for much more of this, amusing as it is—I can't afford to spend every waking hour jerking my own chain.

P.S. Enjoy your money. Maybe a new car will help you get through this.

The hook is swallowed

RH: ...In this case, I had a great deal to work from because I knew the sitter so well, for you see, the bride was my bride, Andrée. The background is that both of us are artists and had become quite successful through our art. We enjoy showing up the destructive myth of the starving artist and that the field of art is not lucrative (after all, one thing most old masters had in common was being able to afford a comfortable life). In a sense our wedding was to both a lasting sacrament and another opportunity to put our stamp on the way things were done. Most people send out engraved invitations, and Andrée did too, except here's were engraved metal plates wrapped in silk moiré covers...nothing exceeds like excess. She had the gown designed by Kenzo, the ceremony was at the Old North Church and we hired out a hall at the Ritz-Carlton for the reception. In short, it would have been a vulgar display of wealth by a couple of nouveau riches if it were not for how elegant and pretty everything was. ...But what's under the surface are two humans...two artists...perhaps workaholic artists who are driven. ...The initial conception was for a large painting with a full-size figure on a small couch, surrounded by all of the stuff Andrée collects...furniture, rugs, vases, tapestries and other clutter. I looked forward to doing it because it would give me a chance to paint different materials and use lots of flashy bravura strokes (after all, I could use it to get more portrait work). ...A manufacturer gave me

some alkyd primer and I used that, to my later chagrin. The painting became even more complex and had a tapestry behind the figure, a couple of dogs on the couch and more junk. It was becoming a farrago, stuffed with more junk than a Christmas goose. Then the first crack appeared. **Soon, the alkyd ground was delaminating from the linen and I was watching all of that work go for naught.** ...If you believe that you are the source of your artistry, you'll not agree with my thinking, but I believe that I am merely a conduit for an art that is born somewhere else. God? Divine afflatus? Karma? Universal consciousness? Whatever it is, I am very aware of ideas coming in on little feet that don't announce themselves...and flee quickly (that's why I emphasize speed. You can't capture fleet-moving ideas if you are too deliberate) ...I come from a family of mariners, true men of the sea, and one thing that stays with me was the "thousand-yard-stare" of the women when they looked out the windows—always looking for a ship to come into port. That's the look I chose to depict. ...Far from being picky little detailed strokes, *The Bride* is typical of my very painterly and loose style. Over a greenish underpainting (purple under the dress) the dress is laid in with house painting brushes between 2" to 3". The strokes are carefully placed but appear to be applied quickly. Some of the little details, such as the buttons, are applied with smaller brushes, but nothing smaller than a #12. BTW the painting is approximately 30" x 40". The Values are kept to a minimum and almost no blending is done. You can really see the strokes. I never use round brushes except to sign a painting (which I rarely do). ...I do work from photos...and I also work from sketches. None of my paintings look like the photos and, as has been said about a visit to Sargent's studio...if you sit for me, you're taking your face in your hands!

RH: I've just returned from your website. Very interesting. Have you done anything since art school (I assume that these standard art school poses were done as school assignments). Also, what sort of altar does the "triptych" go onto? Somehow, the thought of people worshipping at that Mons Veneris strikes me as positively satanic. Also, when painting a triptych, it's always wise to paint THREE pictures. What you have is a folding screen with a nude in the middle. As for the money...have you got a problem with artists making money? Would you rather artists keep that a secret so that your penury is a little easier to swallow? As for the car...yes, I did get my wife a new Range Rover for Christmas, but I haven't bought any since then (although I have my eye on a Cobra). Miles, once you develop your taste and put a bit more effort into your work, you too will be in a position to compete with professionals and earn the fine living that the art field provides to serious artists who are willing to put aside their schoolboy notions and bend their talents to something beyond disembodied portrait studies and the typical nude on a rumpled art school cot. Stick with it.

MM: After reading his first post this week, I had thought that the Swollen One was properly chastened. Here he was, polite and calm and bileless, answering questions, soothing frayed nerves. But we knew he had not hired someone to be politic for him—no, his stamp remained—the asides to "God's divine inspiration" and such—always a big friend-maker among the well-read. And he did not stop with wrapping himself in unctuous pseudo-theology; no, we were treated to a thorough wrapping in the sanctimonies of marriage, too—as if to say, have pity upon me, a married man who paints his lovely

wife, do not attack such a virtuous man (hoping we would so soon forget the virtuous man attacking without scruple everyone we know). Then he strung together every sort of apology for his mediocrity that one could well imagine, but still he did not show it to us—with the excuse that we are not likely buyers, and so are wasting his time.

All fine and good, but when he comes to me, the gloves are removed, as befits the presence of threat. He lapses into the predictable invective—though none of it seems really inspired. I had expected better fun, honestly. No one believes that the Swollenman is a great painter, but some have worshipped him as a cutting polemicist, and I had been honing my repartee. All for nought. It is only the old attacking the young, and the rich miser resenting the man who does not need money and other shiny things to make him look good. Swollenman builds a wall of coinage to add to his list of feints, and he only lacks the flag to make his fortress complete. But we imagine he will have that on the bumper of his Cobra. In his mind that is the most stinging of replies—that Cobra—and I must admit that I consider it a *telling* hit. Oh, that I should have to share a common grave with Mozart and van Gogh and Thoreau and the other impecunious ones!

But I thank Swollenman for his public reply and his complete airing of his perfect taste, both in regards to me and in regards to Yuqi Wang. The impecunious ones of the future will enjoy it immensely. It will rank up there with Tom Taylor's commentary on Whistler and Sickert's opinion of Sargent. Many will say Sickert? Taylor? Precisely.

P.S. If the *mons veneris* scares you, maybe you should stick to painting men.

RH: Miles, you have avoided answering my simple question...are those things examples of your student work or are they what you consider examples of your mature work. Simple question. We do not need your character assassinations, just a clear answer. If they are your student works, one wonders why you'd publish them. If they are your mature works, well... one can hope that positive changes will occur when you mature. What one suspects is that you really cannot see them for what they are.

MM: No, one is only certain that you can't. Or won't, because it would bring down your whole fragile house of cards, propped up only by coinage and cobras. And do not complain of character assassination, from one assassin to a lesser one. I am not complaining—of course, I haven't taken a hit yet. Critiquing a triptych altarpiece with painting, sculpture, poetry, woodwork, etc. based on the pubic hair is not exactly incisive. It is not even witty. It is simply a piece of your own psychological transparency. I had thought I could get you over here to self-destruct. I just thought it would take a bit longer.

P.S. I am just practicing for higher stakes arguments with really nasty people—the avant garde. I hope you don't mind if I use you as a sort of mannequin.

RH: Perhaps English is your second language because you failed to understand the thrust of the sentence. It had to do with a triptych that had only one painted panel. Every other triptych I've seen had THREE painted panels. That's why they call it a TRI-ptych, you know, like TRI-plets, TRI-cycle and TRI-again with another lame excuse. Again, are those student works or are those your mature output? You seem to have great difficulty in giving a straight answer.

MM: (To Ricardo—a pawn of RH) If you are better than any of the artists on ARC, show us your work. Unless you also would like to take the Swollenman dodge, and inform us that it is all in storage or in a vault for posterity. Or maybe the bulb on the scanner is burned out. Or maybe the dog ate it.

The fish swims away, leaving his stomach behind

RH: Ricardo, my mindless pawn, I am off to Cennini Forum to erase all of the disagreements you have had with me in order to keep one more of Mathis' fantasies alive.

MM: Leaving so soon? To lick your wounds, I guess. Too bad, just when you were really beginning to implode, repeating yourself, searching for a new arrow and coming up empty. Most likely you need time to figure out how to boast about your sculpture and your poetry and your grand thematic work, without actually showing us any. Tell us in French, then you can imagine we don't understand.

MM: [after RH had been booted by the moderator of Goodart for attacks on other members] What few seem to understand is that Swollenman didn't need to be booted or "Gandhied". He was playing Wilde to my Whistler—he was standing in a pool of his own blood. He lost every exchange, and was on the point of full collapse. I suppose we will just have to hear of his convalescence in the papers.

[Final point of fact: a triptych is so named because it has three panels, not because it has three paintings. In the middle ages it was common to have triptychs with biblical quotes on the two side panels. As just one example, I recommend Rob to the Memling Museum in Bruges, where there is a *Triptych of the Adoration of the Magi*, anon., 1545, with quotes from Matthew on the side panels. There is also a copy of a similar triptych at the Metropolitan in New York, which you can see for yourself [here](#).]



Censored by Yahoo

by Miles Mathis



It has been an eventful week for me. First I awoke on November 27 to several messages on my answering machine from friends saying that my site was down and my mailbox was bouncing all emails. This was strange since, although my site has been down before for short periods, my mail has never been cut off.

I contacted Yahoo through customer service and got no reply. It has now been ten days and Yahoo has ignored a hatful of requests for an explanation. I have gotten nothing, not one word. [Update: 16 months later, I still have no idea what happened. Yahoo has never contacted me, explained anything to me, refunded any money, or put the site back up].

I read the Geocities terms of service, and it turns out that Yahoo can terminate any account without warning and without explanation. It appears that is precisely what they have done. This was not a free account either. This was a business account with Geocities for which I was paying a monthly fee. I had also bought my domain name from Yahoo, for a nominal fee. Under their terms, this now reverts to them.

Of course I quickly reconstructed my site on another host, a fact you are probably aware of if you are reading this. But that is not the question. The question is why Yahoo would choose to terminate a paying account without warning and without explanation.

Anyone who has looked at my site knows that there is nothing illegal going on there. I have a lot of opinions, but that is about the extent of it. I don't use hate speech, I don't link to porn sites, I don't dabble in off-shore gambling or drugs or money laundering or Paypal rip-offs. Unless art nudity,

questioning 911, writing about free speech, or disagreeing with women is now illegal or legally “offensive”, I can’t see that my site should fall to any censor. I had thought that my site was pretty tame, scholarly even, but maybe I am not objective anymore. Maybe the line in American has backed up so far that I am now over it.

Of course there are tens of thousands of Americans who are more controversial than I am—whose opinions would appear to be more dangerous and offensive to the censors than mine. My problem was that I was perched on an easily loppable branch. A new wave of censorship is just beginning and the major webhosts are of course among the first targets. Given that the USGov wants to quash 911 questions (as the DoD has just admitted), Yahoo and Google and MSN would naturally be the places to start. Attack the defenseless and move on from there.

But if you think you are safe from this kind of thing, think again. In searching for a new host this week, I slogged through a large number of TOS’s (terms of service). Every one I read was legally equivalent to the Yahoo Geocities TOS. Meaning that the wording allowed any host to dump anyone they wanted to. There was always a clause tacked on to some sentence tacked on at the end of some paragraph that said, “or which is otherwise offensive.” Any statement or opinion or image that could be deemed offensive by any reader could be used to terminate the service. Of course, a litigious client could take the host to court and force a judge or jury to decide the meaning of the word “offensive”. But who was going to do that? Yahoo and other hosts assume that few clients will do that. It is easier to just change hosts, as I did. With a week’s worth of work, I have the same site up at a non-Gov host, and I also have the badge of honor of being censored by the goons. If the Gestapo is trying to silence me, I must be doing something right.

The only problem is that, as I said, there is no place to hide. My current host is not beyond the reach of the secret police. Any host in the US is under the umbrella of the Patriot Act and Homeland Security, since that umbrella is well-nigh ubiquitous and infinite. And other parts of the world exist as virtual extensions of the US, in this regard. The CIA has already subpoenaed millions of bank records in Europe, so why should I believe that a foreign host is secure? Especially when Europe cares even less than the US about free speech?

The contradiction that I have finally come up against in my own life is that free speech is one of those rights you have until you try to use it. The only way to avoid the secret police is to have no opinion. If you only do and say those things that cannot possibly offend anyone, then you will be left alone. But you must also recognize that the number of actions, beliefs, images, sentences, and words that offend no one is constantly diminishing. What a normal person could do in the 70’s is not what a normal person can get away with now. Since 911 the constriction has been accelerating, and millions of normal people are feeling choked. The question is, how little air can you survive on? How much of this can be overlooked before you do something? How Orwellian does it have to get before you decide to rebel? No foreign army is going to come in and defeat your Nazis. You are going to have to do it yourself.

[return to 2004](#)

Choosing a Subject - Part I

by Miles Mathis



The naked woman's body
is a portion of eternity
too great for the eye of man.

William Blake

The Impressionists are famous for, among other things, popularizing the belief that, *it's not what you paint, but how you paint it*. John Sargent, in his "impressionist phase"—while painting at Broadway, in Worchestershire, England, in the 1880's—also became known for his arbitrariness in choosing a subject. He explained that he wanted to "acquire the habit of reproducing precisely whatever met his vision without the slightest previous 'arrangement' of detail, the painter's business being not to pick and choose, but to render the effect before him, whatever it might be."

Despite my indebtedness to Sargent, I could not possibly disagree more. The painter's business *is* to pick and choose, lest art become the equivalent of the random snapshot. How does an artist share the mood, personality, and expressiveness, not only of his subject, but of *himself*, except by the choice of subject matter and how to paint it? The line, color, composition and mood of a subject, human or not, must speak to the artist, must interest him in their potential for expression, and must inspire him to express himself *through* them. And so the choice of subject matter becomes the most important decision the artist can make. An artist may practice on random subjects, but he or she cannot hope to produce art randomly.

What an artist chooses to paint says a great deal about what that artist wants to communicate. Renouncing this choice is simply to empty a painting of a large part of its potential for expression and to encourage the viewer to judge a work on its technical merits alone. But a work of art, properly so called, is not just beautiful or interesting *paint*. It must be judged as *a painting*, and as such must carry some quality beyond technical virtuosity. Your choice of subject matter will determine, in large part, what quality it will have.

There are as many different forms of artistic expression as there are expressive artists, but I only know of one well enough to write about it: that being, of course, my own. In this article I hope to clarify the importance of choosing a subject by showing how and why I pick a model, a pose, a composition, and a technique that will express what I have in mind (as far as what I have in mind is conscious, and allows for a rational explanation).

To start with, as a figure painter, I can't overemphasize the importance of hand-picking your models. Anonymous art-class models won't do. Nor will advertising in the paper. The chance of attracting really interesting models that way are almost nil. In order to discover exactly what your inspiration might be, you must give yourself the freedom to choose what *you* want to paint, not what is offered you, or what is available, or what the fashion magazines tell you is beautiful, or what the market asks you to supply. None of this is art. Art is only that which comes from your desire, your need. This is not to say that you should idealize your art, changing your models to fit some pre-conceived notion. It is not to say that you concoct an idea of perfection in your head and then go in search of someone to match it. It is to say only that you must choose for yourself the subjects that interest you. Only in this way can you personalize your treatment of the subject without developing conscious mannerisms. Your works should be recognizable as yours because they express the individuality of your mind, not because they exhibit eye-catching surface characteristics chosen for their salability.

To find this inspiration, you must simply keep your eyes open wherever you go—to the grocery store, the theatre, the library, the swimming pool—and develop the courage to approach the people whom

you find interesting. Be calm (not cool) and trusting, and people will trust you, especially if you have a portfolio with you at all times to prove your intentions and your seriousness. But do not confuse seriousness with being "all business". Make friends, get to know your models—art is not impersonal.

I do not want to give the false impression, though, that is so easy. You will probably not find many good models, and I don't want you to think that there is *anyone* who paints the figure in this day and age who avoids great disappointment and, often, tragic misunderstanding. Perhaps the most discouraging thing one may encounter in a person who otherwise appears polite and intelligent is a mind that is completely closed to anything the least bit out of the ordinary. Artists have become such a fringe element, in the worst possible sense of the word, that no one, not even street people, trusts them. We are only a half-step above lawyers; but at least most people have an idea of what lawyers *do*. The appellation "artist" brings up dozens of cloudy images in the mind of your average citizen, most of them bad if not outright criminal. These images are incomplete—based on a daily diet of sordid news and a spotty (and often equally sordid) knowledge of art history—but they are too often based on fact, sad to say. For example there is the "artist," usually a photographer, who uses his job or hobby as an excuse for meeting women. Let me be clear here: I do not want to be a hypocrite. There is nothing wrong with developing personal relationships with those with whom you work, relationships of friendship or love. The idea that such a development is semi-taboo or unnatural is ridiculous. If we can't find our friends and lovers through our work, which in the modern world takes up so much of our time, we will be even lonelier than we already are. But so-called "artists" who use art only or predominately as a front for sexual conquest are reprehensible, not only for how they generally treat those with whom they work, but for how wary they force potential models to be. A model who has a bad experience with such a *poseur* will at least have an excuse for her skittishness. Only an excuse, mind you, for there is no good reason for anyone not to give other people the benefit of the doubt in a protected situation, no matter what they've been through (I say *protected* because I have never approached a model in a dark alley or in a deserted subway car). In my opinion, people who have allowed themselves to become so jaded that they cannot even entertain the possibility of an honest, enriching encounter, might as well put bullets through their heads. Because, it must be said, they will never again *have* such an encounter.

Another image that pops into people's heads when they hear the word "artist" is that of the Modern paint splatterer or giant-canvas attacker or rusty-metal welder or found-object construction-piece performance-art juggler. It is understandable that a beautiful, intelligent, honest young woman might not see her role in such an art, and question the *motive* for her desired presence.

Then there is the graphic "artist" or fashion designer or advertiser who needs all the pulchritude in the world to sell his shoddy and likely useless product. The only thing that lures the pulchritudinous to

such fields is the huge hourly wages they offer. But no one who is not pursuing "professional" modeling wants to have anything to do with these advertisers.

And finally, the actual pornographers themselves, the generators of a billion-dollar business (according to an estimate I heard on NPR), no doubt refer to themselves, when propositioning models, as "artists." It is no wonder that those we approach are wary.

All this just goes to say that the Ted Bundys and the Jeffrey Dahmers of the world, as well as the multitudes of less-dangerous perverts and money-grubbing phonies make doing anything genuine and good very difficult. Your existence as a true artist and craftsman, with honest emotions, high goals, and real principles, will be not only doubted but resisted. This is one of the facts you will have to accept and overcome. Many artists have been driven back into the house and under the bed upon this discovery: that not only the galleries and buyers, the critics and academics, the museums and the NEA have forgotten what art is about; Mom and Dad and the girl next door have forgotten, too (or, actually, never knew). Mom and Dad, if they can find the time, may pose for you just to be nice (or because they still want to believe, beyond all hope, that despite the fact that you paint nudes you may be able to avoid becoming a sexual deviant or child molester; and because you are painting them you are *not* painting those deplorable nudes—which are hopefully just a phase). But the girl next door is not family, is not so biased in your favor. It would probably take less pleading and convincing to actually get her into bed than to accept, or care, that you have real artistic talents and goals.

Even if you put together a portfolio and resume that would be the envy of the Renaissance Masters, your problems will remain, for only the Renaissance Masters will know its value. The young model you are so excited about will not know what any of it means. If it were fashion photography or even pornography, she might be able to judge its quality; for it is more likely that she has seen these things than that she has seen good figure painting. As for your resume, you might as well save the paper for sketching. The resume of an economist or stockbroker or radiologist might impress someone. But who today could even *read* the resume of an artist. Besides, if your portfolio cannot be understood, what chance is there that your resume will fare better? In the end all you can do is beat the bush and hope to flush the occasional rare bird. For the model, like the client or gallery owner, who is truly interested in art is rare indeed.

Once you have found such a model (and you will, you will, *fidus Achates*) all the rest becomes easier. You will be working with a *natural*, as opposed to a *professional* model, so you don't have to worry about insipid stock poses, disingenuous glamour looks, or other pre-conceived notions. To keep this freshness and ingenuousness, you yourself must resist approaching the session with any hard and fast ideas about what you want from it. At first your model will be nervous and stiff, but if you just let her

be, if you let her move around freely, without restraint, without a lot of "artistic" ideas or intentions in her head (or yours), the pose will come. You will not *make* it come, you will discover it, just by watching. See what she does that is unique. Wait for the moment that says something about her, about you, about your relationship, and seize it. Try to capture something of it on canvas. That is all you can hope to do. Or that is all *I* can hope to do. Even at my best, I have found the task mostly beyond me. Whistler believed that art could surpass nature, that "The Gods stand by and marvel, and perceive how far away more beautiful is the Venus of Melos than their own Eve." I'm afraid I can't concur. I've only been able to approach the beauty of the people I've known—the power of art, even of the greatest masterpiece, is always only fragmentary and partial. The beauty of living flesh cannot be equalled, much less surpassed.

To some this method of choosing a pose, by simply watching, may seem passive (especially for someone who just accused Sargent of being arbitrary). But Rodin, who kept nude models in his studio at all times even when they weren't posing for a particular sculpture (because he liked being constantly reminded of the possibilities and surrounded by spontaneous inspiration), was once accused of letting the models give him orders, instead of the other way around. He replied, "I do not take orders from them but rather from Nature." He meant, of course, not only nature as an external force, but also his own nature. Life spoke both to him and through him. And so this method is anything but passive. It is active without being manipulative. It allows the subconscious to make its choices without the interference of reason.

Pascal said, "The heart has its reasons which Reason cannot know." There are times when analysis, the interference of reason, or of the left brain, is simply counterproductive. For if anything must be kept in mind it is that the intelligent artist must guard against over-refining his work. Perfect work is uninteresting work, for perfection is not human. Look at the work of Rembrandt or Goya or Chardin or Corot—their imperfections are as necessary, as beautiful, as their perfections. As Heinrich Heine said, "As in life, so in art/ The greatest good is grace."

What this means to you, day by day, is that when you are painting you should lay in some areas quickly, spontaneously, and then just let them be. Don't feel like you have to work the whole surface over and over till it glows. Allow for some variation. Some areas may look best scratched in with just a turpentine wash or a thin layer of paint. Other places may need to be built up painstakingly with multiple layers, impasto, or glazes. The point is to paint with no preconceptions. Don't go in thinking, "I'm an Impressionist, I have to paint everything loose and thick and bright," or, "I love this photograph and I'm going to copy it down to the tiniest detail." Go in thinking only, "This subject has something to say to me, and I to it, and whatever I have to do, I *will* do."

Avoid all formulas. Avoid, even, consciously developing "a style of your own". A style of this sort is a marketing trick, and has nothing to do with art. In fact, it is a barrier to art, because it limits the creative possibilities at the very beginning of a work. Technique must always remain a means to an end. You must always control your tools, including your style, rather than let them control you. The painter who limits himself by choosing a "signature style," an immediately recognizable palette, or brushstroke, or subject, will become an ally to the gallery owner and buyer, but will never develop beyond a very narrow set of boundaries. This is because he has indicated by his choices that he is a businessman, not an artist. But a real artist makes artistic decisions, such as choice of subject matter, color, or brushstroke, based on artistic considerations, not on material considerations. This is what it means to be an artist. The rest are just businesspeople who happen to deal in the production of pictures.

As you mature as an artist, you will find that certain things work for you, and these things will show up more or less often in your work, naturally defining your style. The question to ask is "how do they work for you?" If they work to allow you to express yourself, fine. But if they work as shortcuts to help you work faster, or if they work as formulas to help you work without having to think, or if they work as eye-catchers to help you sell paintings, they need to be resisted. You can be sure that none of the great artists of the past allowed themselves to be defined by the market or by the clock. The great masters, like Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Van Gogh, were great because of how they thought about their work. Their standards were incredibly high and they disdained compromise. They painted or sculpted to produce great paintings or sculpture. Everything else was secondary. Such single-mindedness would be considered monomania these days, but it remains the only way to stay the course.

Choosing a Subject - Part II

The Nude

by Miles Mathis



The most difficult subject you will approach as an artist is the nude. The nude figure is not only the most technically demanding subject, it is the most psychologically demanding as well. It is psychologically demanding because in tackling this subject an artist comes face to face with his personal feelings toward his subject, whether these feelings are sexual or not. He also of necessity comes face to face with society's feelings toward the nude in art and toward nudity in general. Personal and societal emotions run highest with regard to the nude, for obvious reasons. A painting of a landscape or still life can inspire and elicit strong emotions in the artist and viewer, but the human face and figure are unmatched as conveyors of human emotion. As van Gogh said, "I prefer painting people's eyes to cathedrals, however solemn and inspiring the latter may be—a human soul, be it that of a poor beggar or a streetwalker, is more interesting to me."

For this reason the nude is the subject least amenable to a strictly formal treatment. As a teacher I never recommend a style: an artist must feel free to abstract as little or as much as he likes, concentrating on line or color or composition as his inspiration demands. But for me abstracting away from mood and emotion in a nude (or any figure) is sacrilegious. The mood and emotion shared must be personal and therefore cannot be taught, but drawing the figure without emotion is a contradiction. It is bad manners, if nothing worse: it is like treating a lover or a friend as an inanimate object.

Beyond this, it is a error in judgment, analogous to the error of modernism. In an earlier paper I argued that using visual art as a political tool was like using a dove's wing as a hammer. Treating the figure as a compositional device or as a prop or as a human still life is also the misuse of a tool. It is to dehumanize the human, which is a sin whether it is done by the avant garde or the realist.

In a conversation with an artist friend about another figure painter, the friend made this comment regarding the composition: "The problem is he puts too much space around the figure." My reply was, "No, the problem is that he puts too much space *inside* the figure." Whenever I see a face or a figure that is treated like a flower or a table, I sigh and turn away. So much potential for expression has been lost.

The problem, of course, is that one cannot invest a drawing or painting with emotion just by wanting to. In many ways, the more an artist's intentions become conscious the less likely they are to be realized. A work of art will be emotional not to the extent the artist *desires* it to be; it will be emotional to the extent, or depth, that he or she actually *feels* it. Passion cannot be faked or premeditated. This is why one's life *outside* of art is so important, and why I put so much emphasis on addressing my reader as a whole person. Because only a whole person can create art. There will be no love in your art if there is no love in your life, there will be no depth in your art if there is no depth to your emotions, and there will be no depth to your emotions unless you allow them to react with the world, positively *and* negatively.

Once an artist allows himself this "worldliness," he quickly discovers that society's attitudes about the nude, and the nude in art, are anything but encouraging. There are a few connoisseurs who appreciate the nude, but in the US they are very rare. They are very rare even in Europe, where everyone assumes that nudity is less taboo. And the more emotion one shares the more difficult it becomes. Any content in a painting, any intention beyond decoration, will be received defensively by the great majority of gallery goers. And this is never more true than with respect to the nude.

Some critics have complained that art does not effect the viewer as strongly and deeply as other modern media. But the truth is that modern viewers do not *want* to be effected strongly and deeply by the sort of emotions that art is best at evoking. Somehow it is easier to disavow the brutality of a faked death on the movie screen or an anonymous death on TV, or to rationalize the shallow and meaningless sex on both screens, or to distance oneself from global politics and mass destruction, than it is to make an intimate connection to the mind of another individual. In the last case it too difficult to suppress an honest response; and if that response is not one that fits in well with a viewer's "lifestyle" or current assumptions, it can lead to confusing and painful introspection--a response most people would prefer to avoid. As Joshua Reynolds, an English painter in the 18th century, said, "There is no length to which a man will not go to avoid the necessity of thinking." And I would add, "There is no length to which the modern man will not go to avoid the necessity of *feeling*."

This reaction is probably more difficult for the artist to come to terms with than any other. A real artist knows that a strong emotional content is *de rigueur*, but there are few viewers who are comfortable with this fact. Even those who may admit it as a piece of scholarship often deny it when looking at actual paintings. One can understand a viewer's discomfort before the brutalities of Modernism, but even the sublime fare of more traditional art often causes unease when it tempts more than the tip of the tongue. The bottom line is the better the work—the greater the depth, the more personal the inspiration, the more intimate the feeling—the less likely it is to find a buyer or admirer. Artists have always known this. A nude is hard enough to sell as decoration; make a real work of art out of it and the public won't know what to do with it. Look at the reaction to Munch's *Puberty*, not just the historical reaction but the current reaction. It may be worth millions but most people can't even look at it. I personally face this fact everyday. My nudes, which the avant garde appears to think are just regressive bits of classicism, evoke the strangest reactions in the various realist markets, where they are seen as almost menacing. It is not the sexual content that viewers find off-putting, since there is no sexual content. It is the emotional content. These are not just figure *studies*, they are real figures. As such, they are scary.

As progressive, enlightened, and sexually-liberated as Americans may think they have become, most are still prudish and puritanical when it comes to the nude, whether in art or in life. A minority of Americans would call themselves devout, in regards to any religion, and yet most are more prejudiced against the nude than were the Renaissance clergy or Martin Luther himself. Michelangelo was commissioned by both the city of Florence and by Pope Julius in Rome to create murals containing large numbers of nudes, male and female (and not just Biblical). But he would have no chance of getting these works past the modern censors, so fearful of our own bodies have we become. The Sistine Chapel murals would not be possible now. Frederick Hart's *Ex Nihilo* [Washington National Cathedral] is a thousand times tamer than the Sistine Chapel, and had to be.

Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear of another public institution somewhere in the country, a bank, or a city hall, or a university, or a library where art has been removed for being offensive, often to only a single individual. And the examples are startling. I'm not talking about Robert Mapplethorpe or other high-profile "shock artists". I'm talking about one exposed breast in an otherwise inoffensive and innocent photograph or painting. The bare bottom of a Native American or Nubian. Even, as I recently saw, a fully clothed Virgin Mary whose breasts were considered too sexy. Dozens of sculptures in Washington, DC, have been draped by executive order, with no referendum or public discourse. Religion is the primary cause of this reaction against artistic nudity, but current wisdom has added the increased incidence and/or awareness of rape, molestation, and other perversions to our doctrinal arguments against nudity and sexuality. This coming together of fact, religion and fear has all but negated the possibility of seeing these categories in a positive light. The modern aptitude for mistrust and pessimism completely overmatches any aptitude for recognizing and encouraging beauty and hope. We all have our reasons for mistrust, and they are good ones; but we must remember that we also have our reasons for trust, and that they are better ones--lest society actually collapse. We must

remember that the same sexuality that is *misused* to create offensive and criminal images and acts may also be *used* to create children. The same nudity that can lead an unhealthy man to rape can inspire Michelangelo to sculpt *The David*, can inspire Velazquez to paint the *Rokeby Venus*.

Nonetheless, there will always be many people who will give up the possibility for virtue if they can at the same time give up the potential for evil. If sexuality, if nudity, are potentially evil, do away with them, they will say. It is better to do nothing than to fear that you might do something wrong. But it is worth noting that the people who feel this way really mistrust themselves first. And they misunderstand virtue. To be virtuous is to be presented with the opportunities of life, fully and freely, and to make the right choices *because you desire them*. It is to be presented with all the possibilities of nudity and sexuality, including the potential for evil, and to choose to be good, *because the goodness appeals to you*. To be more specific, it is to be capable of seeing the Virgin Mary's areolae through her dress and finding that naturally human rather than sinfully tempting. It is to be capable of seeing a Sioux warrior's loins in a Public Works mural as historically accurate rather than threateningly pagan. And it is to be capable of recognizing the beauty of a prepubescent girl (in a photograph by Jock Sturges, for instance) and to rejoice in that beauty, to treat it as an affirmation of all that is still good and pure in the world, rather than as an invitation to molest her. Finally it is to guard your own pure love for beauty by not allowing *it* to be sullied by the impure thoughts and desires of others.

I have been told that the nude in art is dangerous because it is tempting. It is like playing with fire. But isn't that the way life is? Isn't that the way life is *supposed* to be? A life without choices is no life at all. People do have bodies. People must have sex. They can have beautiful bodies and beautiful sex, or ugly bodies and ugly sex; beautiful attitudes about their bodies and their sexuality, or ugly attitudes about their bodies and their sexuality. But they cannot renounce the choice to have bodies and sex. Not, it seems to me, without renouncing life itself. Many are no longer able, and *know* they are no longer able, to make the right choice: to choose to see beauty instead of immodesty, to see love and trust and intimacy instead of lust and violence and selfishness. And so they renounce the choice. But where there can be no sin there can be no virtue. Or, if those terms carry too much baggage, I might say that where there is no possibility of doing the wrong thing, there is no possibility of doing the right thing. And so many prefer to do nothing. Their love is nonexistent, or tepid and unfulfilling. They look guilty in the presence of the beauty of their own children. Their lives become a disgrace to any healthy religion or god.

This all goes to say that the contemporary artist, as far as he or she is interested in a healthy life and a healthy art, is in the position of a blade runner. The artist (and especially the painter or sculptor of nudes) must run, and run well, a narrow path between artistic and sexual resignation (which resignation leads to creative celibacy) and outright hedonism and perversion, all encouragement being to fall off on either side. To discover the true nature of the instincts one must first make an experiment of oneself.

An artist must allow himself the freedom to approach nudity and sexuality (if such is his or her interest) with an unjaundiced eye; to see it, as far as possible, like Adam saw Eve, or Eve saw Adam. It is to take a risk, to array the actual choices of life before you as they are naturally presented, and to choose based on your own store of wisdom and strength. It is to align yourself against the whole world, if the truth demands it: to discover your paradise and go there, alone if need be.

If you have a healthy attitude about the nude, if you have a healthy attitude about anything, you will have immediately pared your audience down to almost nothing. This is hard to admit. But once you have made this sobering discovery, you are free to go from there. Dazzlingly free. Meaning that almost nobody will give a damn what you do one way or the other.

This admission, as hopeless as it might seem at first, actually puts you in the firmest of creative positions. After all, the best place to begin creating is in the void. Here, at least, you don't have to worry about bumping into or tripping over anyone's expectations. Perhaps if you had not been forced by circumstance into this empty room, you would have spent a lifetime searching for its solitude.

Pencil Profile 2020



pencil
20 x 13 in.

PRINCE GIMMICK

by Miles Mathis

I remember that George Carlin started one of his last routines by saying, “I’d like to begin by saying fuck Lance Armstrong. Fuck him and his balls and his bicycles and his steroids and his yellow shirts and the dumb empty expression on his face. I’m tired of that asshole. And while you’re at it, fuck Tiger Woods, too. Aren’t you tired of having other people tell you who your heroes should be? I can pick my own heroes, thank you very much, and so can you.”

I feel like that about the art heroes of the 20th century that have been shoved down our throats by the various promoters and pimps in New York City and elsewhere. For instance, fairly often when I tell someone I am a realist, they say, “Oh, like Chuck Close.” No, not like fucking Chuck Close, that fat overpriced phony. You can tell a lot by people’s heroes, and Close is not one of my heroes. One of Close’s heroes is Andy Warhol, and that told me just about all I needed to know, from the very beginning. Warhol was the goddamned king of the creeps, and no one worth knowing would claim him as a hero. If anyone starts talking about Andy Warhol, I just walk the other way. Nothing else really needs to be said: the chance that person will say anything intelligent or interesting is zero, and I’m not going to hang around to listen to it. The stories we hear about Close’s lousy childhood tell us the same thing: Close wasn’t interested in being a great artist, he was interested in being a *famous* artist like Andy, and he says it straight out. He was ambitious. As greedy little Americans we are supposed to be impressed by that. We are supposed to slobber on his piles of money and kiss his gold-plated flabby ass. But it doesn’t impress me at all. I don’t want that and never have and never will. He can have his money and his fawning promoters and his interviews with the [CIA... I mean media](#). I find my heroes elsewhere, and pick them by other standards.

Fortunately, high profile people like Close allow us to see the people around them for what they are, too. When you see people standing in front of a Close canvas, truly fascinated by the method, you know you are in the presence of a breathtaking stupidity. These are people that are trying to pretend to know something about art—that is why they are in the gallery or museum, we must suppose—and yet here they are judging art on its method. They are parked there, mouth agape, in wonderment at *pixels* in a painting. They will tell you Close painted it without a paintbrush, and expect you to find that nearly miraculous, like someone who built a spaceship out of toothpicks and superglue. These people may be wearing \$20,000 watches and \$500 haircuts, but they are precisely as elevated in their tastes as those agog in Cawker City, Kansas, clucking over the world’s largest ball of twine. No doubt they would find the *Mona Lisa* more interesting as an artifact if it came to their attention that Leonardo painted it without a paintbrush, perhaps using the pubic hair of Vestal Virgins mounted on the blades of his proto-helicopter.

These people seem incapable of seeing the artistic bottom line of any Close painting: it is ugly. It is some big head of some fat-headed nobody, purposely painted as if a machine painted it. That is already inartistic in three fundamental ways. Nietzsche said, "It is easier to be gigantic than to be beautiful." So Close has chosen giantism, of course. By choosing to blow up face-on snapshots of fellow fakes and phonies, Close has also denied us interesting subjects. He could not bother to try and show us someone we might wish to see. Finally, mimicking a machine is not artistic, by the very definition of artistic. If a machine can do it, it isn't art. So why would anyone bother to mimic a method that was inherently inartistic, and why would anyone find it fascinating? This entire phenomenon is useful only as a very tall sign announcing the ineptitude and confusion of the milieu. In the 19th century, artists and clients tried their best to avoid looking like boobies. In the 20th century, they tried their best to look like sub-boobies, and succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Close all but admits that he wanted to be shallow and plastic and one-dimensional, and the clients admit it, too, not even being careful to avoid those words. Also, in the 19th century, at least one critic in 50 years would have suggested that Close was suffering from chronic self-plagiarism and an amazing narrowness of conception. But I have never read a hint of it in the 20th or 21st centuries. The narrower the better, I suppose.

And as for the "virtuosity" we hear so much about, that should have been deflated in 1988, when Close lost the use of his hands. He has still not regained use of his fingers, but we see no difference in quality before and after that time. To see what I am getting at here, we have to imagine that if we went back to the 16th century and lopped off both Michelangelo's arms, his work might have suffered just a bit. By the same token, if we went back to 1970 and crushed all Van Cliburn's fingers in a vise, his piano playing might have taken a noticeable dive. It is hard to play Rach3 with your two elbows. Therefore, if the loss of the use of his fingers has not affected Close's paintings, then it is hard to see what role dexterity or virtuosity has played in their creation. I will be told that the virtuosity is in the conception, but the conception is just blowing up a photo very large and painting swirlies in the pixels. That isn't virtuosity, that is a gimmick.

Close has neither elevated nor updated nor "modernized" the portrait, he has simply sullied it. Like other moderns, he has misdirected the audience's attention into forms and conventions, when real art and portraiture have nothing to do with forms and conventions. Forms and conventions are means, and the ends of art are not the same as the means. A perfect technique is actually a technique the audience never notices, as we have been told by many of the wise over the centuries and millennia. Calling attention to technique has always been a gaucherie, and still is. So why do the moderns misdirect us this way? Why are we always looking at forms and conventions with these people? Because if you are looking at forms and conventions, you aren't noticing the complete lack of artistic qualities. You aren't noticing that there is no beauty or emotion or subtlety or intimacy. Gimmicks are used specifically to draw your attention away from fundamental disabilities and shortcomings. Because the "artist" is not capable of real art, he redirects your gaze with a set of parlor tricks. The artist himself does this with gimmickry and politics and theory, and the gallery does it by filling your ears with big meaningless words and sentences. You are so overwhelmed with various stupidities and vulgarities, your eyes and heart forget to notice that you have been served no art.

Because Close is now in a wheelchair, he is supposed to be beyond criticism, but that is just more modern bullshit. As if I have to like everyone who is disabled in any way, or give them a pass. I feel precisely the same about Close as I do about Stephen Hawking. As with Close, I think Hawking's theories and press releases and books are bunkum, and the fact that he is or is not in a wheelchair has nothing to do with it. These guys don't want our pity and say so, and yet most people judge them—or refrain from judging them—out of some mistaken idea of pity. At least I do them the favor of treating them like the other artists and scientists worthy of my polemic. I despise them without prejudice.

But it is not just the clueless clients and promoters of modernism that pretend to find Close fascinating. Even my fellow realists often talk about Close with stars in their eyes, or with some apparently real levels of admiration. I used to think it was a relative thing: at least Close was not piling rocks on top of each other or exhibiting lotto tickets or turds. As a painter of heads, he had one thing in common with us. To “go with the flow” just a tiny bit, we had to mention someone we could tolerate, and Close was at hand for this. But now I am of a different opinion. Realists are almost insupportably naïve, and this naivete is manifest in the pathetic hope that they themselves will someday be tapped by *Pace* or *Gagosian* or *Saatchi* or *Mary Boone*. They think they are maintaining bridges or at least avoiding burning bridges by saying nice things about Close or somebody like him. They imagine that art is becoming more inclusive, and they imagine that it is best to live and let live.

Wrong. That is like imagining that the banks and the oil companies are becoming more inclusive. That is like Lehman Brothers assuming that Goldman Sachs' company policy was “live and let live.” It is the cardinal error of the unilateral ceasefire. The moderns have been strafing us non-stop for a century, but we think if we blow them a few kisses they will call it quits and invite us across no-man's land. I have news for you: it ain't gonna happen, not this decade, not next decade, not ever. NEVER. If you are a real artist, the fact is their definition of art is the opposite of yours, and they are not inclusive. They have not included you or any like you, they do not include you or any like you, and they will never include you or any like you, as long as they run the show. On the contrary, they will continue to make sure that you are kept out of the graduate programs, the NEA, the museums, the magazines, and the top galleries. They have made this very clear. They are not pretending otherwise. They have put up no white flags, signed no treaties, sent no ambassadors of peace.

No, Modern art has proved to be like kudzu or cockroaches or bagworms: there is no living in peace with it. It is like living in peace with a python wrapped around your neck. There is only one sort of peace the python wants from you.

There will be no self-created Renaissance, no spontaneous uprising, no “natural return to sanity.” If anything happens, it will be because real artists made it happen. No one is going to rescue you: you will have to rescue yourselves. And if you don't rescue yourselves, you can be sure your children and grandchildren will live through the same sort of crap you lived through. I am sure the realists in the 1950's thought as you do: they thought it was passing fad, a swing of the pendulum, something beyond

their ken or control. They were wrong and so are you. Pendulums do not swing for no reason. They swing because they are pushed. If you do not push back, the pendulum will knock you over and over and over.

Close's hero is Warhol, but one of my heroes is Whistler. I often sound like a 19th century artist or critic when I attack the moderns, and this is no accident. In my opinion, that is the last time artists or writers had any sense. Neither Whistler, nor for that matter his archenemy Ruskin, would be impressed by Close. And while I am at it, neither would Van Gogh. Vincent hated insincerity above all else, and all of modernism reeks of insincerity. No one except maybe Seurat would have been impressed by Close, and that is because Seurat was a precursor of Close: an artist of small talent hiding behind a gimmick. Like Close, Seurat was a one-trick pony, and the one trick wasn't even impressive from any distance. But back to Whistler. Whistler is a hero for two reasons: 1) he understood what art was about, 2) he understood that you have to fight back. If you don't, these hoards of imposters will overwhelm you. He saw it coming, and provided the method for defeating it even as he fell to it. He fell to it because he had no allies. Like me, he was very nearly a lone voice. But it takes very few allies to win such a war, since the enemy is so weak. Yes, the enemy has numbers and it may control the media and so on, but it has no real power. Power is defined by the ability to do things, and these people can't really do anything except get in the way. They can stand around and flap their gums and have parties and sell crap to each other, but they can't create art. If you can't create art, it is difficult to have power in art. As a matter of art history, your influence is only negative, and it is not clear to me that negative influence can be called a form of power.

Real artists have always had a massive amount of power that they have usually refused or declined to wield. Because they can create art, they have already trumped an infinite number of people who cannot create art, so numbers mean nothing. There is no democracy in art. Seven billion non-artists voting for non-art cannot make anything art. Only an artist can make art. You cannot vote feeling into a painting, just as you cannot vote a man into outerspace without a rocket. History has proven again and again that a small number of people who can do anything can defeat vast hordes of people who can do nothing, and that rule holds across all fields—war, politics, science, art, sports, you name it.

Yes, Whistler, like Thoreau and Emerson and Carlyle, understood that numbers mean nothing. If you are an artist, you can't be outnumbered in your own field by non-artists. Prunes can't outnumber apples on an apple tree. The current confusion can only be created for and by people who don't know what words mean. I know that nothing these people do is significant, by the simple definition of significant. This is because I judge art by *artistic* standards. The art at *Pace* or *Gagosian* may be significant financially, and this is the way it is judged by most; but I can see that is illogical. It is like judging Wall Street by artistic qualities. If I judged a stock transaction by its line quality or its feeling, you would think I was insane, and you would be right. But you see people judging “works of art” by their sales prices, and you find nothing strange in this. Every article about Close or the other artists of *Pace* or *Gagosian* or *Saatchi* is heavy with dollar signs. Why is Close famous, a reader will ask? He is famous because he sold for \$3 million at Sotheby's. That is not a logical answer. Nobody remembers what

Michelangelo was paid for the Sistine Chapel. If a young person should ask, “Why is Michelangelo famous?” we don’t answer, “Because he was obscenely rich.” We show the young person the Sistine Chapel, and that is all the answer that is required. That is all the answer required because any child can see the virtuosity and the emotion and the greatness on the ceiling, without any subtext or audiotape. Real achievement requires no promotion, since it is never in doubt. Does Kobe Bryant require promotion? No. His agents and sponsors don’t have to promote him, they only have to use him to make money. Conversely, modern art requires exorbitant levels of promotion. As a percentage of product, the promotion of modern art exceeds even that of Hollywood movies. The less real product there is, the more promotion it requires, for obvious reasons. The more something is advertised, the less likely it is you need it, and the more likely it is to be worthless.

I said that Whistler fell, but even that is giving the moderns too much credit. Whistler only fell with his death, and if you study the timeline you see that real art pretty much fell with him. Whistler won every argument and always managed to make his opponents look ridiculous. He also managed to prop up his own career all along, against ever increasing tides. One might say he even prevented the deluge for a short time, since England was the last place modernism really took off. You have to define Whistler as modern to make England modern, and I have shown in other papers why that is misdirection. Whistler is called modern for saying that art was an arrangement of colors and lines, but of course he meant an *aesthetic* arrangement, not a formal arrangement. He had no interest in forms for the sake of forms. Again, they were a means to an artistic end, not an end in themselves. Regardless, it is his fight against all the various forms of advancing vulgarity that is important, as well as his recognition of the danger of the writer and academic—the *litterateur*. In short, his crusade against the hack, in all his various guises, as fake artist, fake writer, fake critic, fake gallery, fake museum director. Whistler demanded artistic qualifications from those who would enter his field or his studio, and, lacking those qualifications, he simply dismissed them as interlopers and carpetbaggers. He unmasked them and cut them into little pieces, till they could no longer stand on their own legs. That was the winning formula, and still is.

Whistler never really fell, he just failed to be followed up. No one took up his cudgels. His side in the fight didn’t lose, it just quit fighting. It lost by default. It wasn’t defeated by superior works or superior arguments or superior wit, it was defeated because it no longer believed in itself, for some reason. It was its own self-criticism that defeated it, its own sinking and spreading feeling that it had no good works left in it, that it had done all it had come to do. It couldn’t go on painting Greek gods and goddesses forever, and what else was there? If you can’t keep climbing, you might as well fall and keep falling.

Well, I now know they were wrong. Yes, it was time for new subjects and new treatments, but no fall was called for. For the creative, there is always something new under the Sun. I may not be able to equal or surpass the greatest artists of history, but that is not my concern. Clement Greenberg claimed that Michelangelo stopped the early 20th century in its tracks, since no one could hope to match him, but that didn’t stop artists in the 17th century from painting. It didn’t stop Rodin, at the end of the 19th.

So the problem couldn't have been of that sort. The problem wasn't an end of art, or a lack of possibilities, it was emasculation of the species. It was the arrival of the lastman. It wasn't that great art couldn't be done, it was that a new century of Bartlebys preferred not to. It was easier to pass off urinals as art, and the new century preferred the easy way. This century wanted the rewards without the work, the fruits without the watering, the crop without the plowing. Which is precisely what they have. They have the food without the vitamins, the science without the mechanics, and the art without the feeling or skill. We exist in a depleted culture, and the only thing we haven't yet done is remove the oxygen from the air. But we are working on that, too.

Modern art is depleted just like the soil and the oceans and the food. Depleted soil is stripped of its important constituents, and only the bare sand and rocks remain. In the same way, a Close painting has been stripped of its nutrients, and it can only induce an artistic hunger. It is the tattered husk standing for the corn, the straw standing for the wheat germ. Monsanto itself has learned from Close, giving us bigger and shinier food in lieu of nutritious food. It is easier to be gigantic than to be nutritious. The same sort of people are fooled by Close as are fooled by Monsanto. They mistake the form for the substance.

But real figure painting and portraiture are still possible. There are things to do. Among all the easy paths and shortcuts and mazes of cutbacks and reversals, real roads still exist, and you can get somewhere by walking them. You may not arrive at the bank with heavy pockets, but you will arrive at more meaningful destinations, with your hands quite full.

The Lastman in Comedy

by Miles Mathis



Today's headlines included Michael Richards' apology for using the word "nigger" in a comedy act. A few months ago the press piled on Mel Gibson for getting drunk and saying stupid things about Jews. In between, we saw John Kerry dismissed from any future political hope because he told a joke with an unclear punchline.

I find all of these things very offensive, but not for the reason everyone else appears to. For me they are clear signs of the Lastman. The Lastman is a concept of Friedrich Nietzsche. One of my early papers first published at Art Renewal was about the Lastman and how his arrival was being announced in the field of art. In this paper I will go beyond art, to show how the Lastman is solidifying his presence in the world at large.

The Lastman is a period in the evolution of the human species. The Lastman is an intellectual and moral reversion, a dumbing down, a conscious return to infantilism. It is the descent into idiocy. Nietzsche believed that the Lastman would survive for a limited time, ultimately trumped by the

Overman. The Overman would build a bridge over the small-minded Lastman, taking us into a broader, deeper, more complex future.

I am not here to discuss or analyze Nietzsche or any of his theories, but his term is useful to me here since it is so vivid and powerful. He told us that the Lastman would be like a cow, blinking contently in the sun. A stupid beast, wholly controlled by the environment and the farmer.

Obviously, we have not achieved this final level of contentedness and ignorance, but the pathways have been set to take us there quite quickly. One of these pathways is beaten by those who would outlaw certain words. Another pathway is beaten by those who would criminalize getting mad, saying stupid things, making mistakes, being human. The samples above beat both these pathways, and these pathways are now broad and clear.

Let us start with Michael Richards. Richards is famous for playing Kramer on *Seinfeld*. He has now returned to stand-up. As I said, he recently called some black hecklers “niggers” and the uproar has been gigantic. He appeared on David Letterman, looking like a deathrow inmate, apologizing profusely. He hired a foremost “crisis expert” to help him apologize to the black community. Jesse Jackson has gotten involved.

Jackson has claimed publicly that, “We have to evaluate the use of the n-word and categorize it as hate speech, no matter who uses it.” That is, we have a famous black man who cannot use the word himself, even when responding to a story about the word. In Jackson’s sentence, “nigger” would not be directed at anyone, it would just be a word used as a word. But Jackson can still not justify putting it in print.

I have seen the Richards incident in question and I think this reaction is absurd. To begin with, I would like to remind my readers of a quote from Kindergarten. Not Kierkegaard, Kindergarten. Since everyone is acting like they are five years old, this is appropriate. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

Have we matured beyond that quote? Have we come to realize, as towering intellectuals and politically savvy operatives and scientifically advanced beings, that words can in fact break our bones? Not at all. Richards’ little fight with his hecklers was on precisely the same level as a playground shouting match, and it meant no more and no less. Little Bobby and Charlie on the playground don’t hire crisis experts and feel the need to apologize on David Letterman and go into a permanent career-ending

funk. They just show up at school the next day and shrug it off. Yes, it was stupid. Yes, it was a waste of time. Yes, they could have done better. But so what? It was just a couple of temporarily angry people talking loudly.

There is some belief that Richards' name calling was worse than the name calling on the other side, though I am not sure why. When you are fighting you look for words that will hurt. That is what fighting is. In the exchange on tape, the hecklers say some very mean things, things that would hurt more than the generalized and fairly meaningless "nigger" that Richards threw back at them. "Nigger" is not a powerful slur, since it basically means, "you're black!" So what. That is not even a slur, or it is a slur on the level of "whitey." Both are meaningless, and rely on the receiver for any real content. If someone calls me whitey, I have trouble attaching much importance to it. Black people could choose to feel the same way. Of course, Richards may intend, and the hecklers may have felt, that the content was more along the lines of, "my ancestors were free men and your ancestors were slaves, therefore I am better than you," but that is a gross generalization, too. These hecklers could be from Africa, Europe, etc., or Richards' ancestry could include slaves. In fact, it probably does. If you go back far enough, everyone's ancestors were enslaved at one time or another. Again, so what?

The problem with Richards' slur is not that it was cutting, but that it was childish. The real problem has to do with the fact that he got beat. These hecklers were attacking him with specific things, calling him a has-been, a one-hit wonder, things that must have hurt, and did hurt. All he could come up with is a generalized playground slur on the level of five year olds. He should apologize, but not for using a forbidden word. He should apologize for claiming to be a clever man, for getting paid for being quick on his feet, and then standing up there and not being able to cut down a couple of drunks.

It was not so long ago that comedians of all colors got up on the stage and felt free to say pretty much whatever they wanted. If they bombed, then it was left at that. If they weren't able to justify the profanity and borderline offense by wrapping it in laughs, then they didn't get hired next time. I am thinking of Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy, and George Carlin, especially. Can you imagine Pryor or Murphy agreeing with Jesse Jackson that the word "nigger" should be outlawed?

George Carlin is a white guy who *still* gets away with saying "nigger," and it is because he is funny. He is able to include it without offense, as a way of asserting freedom. He says many potentially offensive things, steps over the line, pushes the boundary, but the audience never turns on him. Why? Because he is a great comedian. The audience doesn't feel qualified to turn on him. They may get home and say, "Wow, that was over the line, I'm not sure I agree with that." But in most cases they pay their \$30 and go back the next time Carlin is in town. They recognize that George Carlin is a human being with whom they are going to disagree on some things. They aren't going to laugh at every single

thing. Some things may shock them. But they go on with their lives. They don't request a groveling public apology in front of the censors, a scarlet N, 40 days of hairshirts and paternosters, and a permanent fall from TV grace.

Ben Tripp is another comedian who gets away with using the word "nigger." Tripp writes for the lefty mag *Counterpunch*, and there has been no uproar there over the word, that I know of. In Tripp's case, this is because his politics is well known (he is clearly not a racist), because he is very funny, and because he uses the word to make anti-racist points. His audience accepts the word as a word and moves on.

But Richards' audience was not able to do that, to go on with it. Was it his fault? Undoubtedly. Was it also their fault? Undoubtedly. This is an audience that has been schooled by Jesse Jackson and all the absurd politics of the day. Now, I caucused for Jackson when I was in college. But like almost everyone else, Jackson has since nose-dived into some strange Nunnery morality, where people can't get mad, can't make mistakes, can't use certain words, blahblahblah. Categorizing the word "nigger" as hate speech is equivalent to outlawing the word, and that precedent is much more dangerous to a free country than any silly war of words between drunk people. Outlawing words is Orwellian, whether it is done by the far right or the far left. There is simply no moral justification for outlawing words.

In pretty much the same category, we have Mel Gibson. Fifty years ago, people would have responded to Mel Gibson in a completely different way. Some readers will answer that this is because we were all tolerant of racism back then, but I don't think this is true. There were a lot of racists then and there are a lot now. But the public reaction doesn't have much to do with racism. It has to do with a different sort of intolerance, an intolerance for people making mistakes, acting like idiots, saying ridiculous things, and getting caught at it. The rational reaction is to say, "Mel is an intemperate person who I disagree with on certain issues. He needs to hire a driver before he kills someone or himself with drunken driving." But people can't stay on target. The DWI issue, which is the one that breaks people's bones, has been swamped by the speech issue. Most people think it is more important that Mel likes to scream obscenities at people when he gets drunk. It is very important to get him in line on words and ideas. It is not important to keep him from killing people with his car, but it is very important that he like Jews.

Why? There are a lot of people who don't like me, but I don't spend any time asking them to apologize for it. If people want to hate me or disagree with me, that is their business. They shouldn't have to apologize for feeling what they feel, even if it is wrong. Mel has every right to get drunk and act like an ass. Everyone I know gets drunk and/or acts like an ass sometimes. That's what people do. They get angry, they get depressed, they confused, and so on. So what? Does that mean these people can't

do their jobs, can't raise families, can't make movies, can't paint pictures, can't vote? How Mel Gibson deals with his anger or his confusion is his own business, as long as he doesn't drive drunk, and I would never think to judge his movies based on his drunken tirades. A lot of your heroes, whoever they were, went on drunken tirades, or the equivalent, and if you plan to dismiss everyone who disagrees with you or who acts like an ass occasionally, you will be left with no one. Even Jesus had his storms in the marketplace, even Gandhi made his mistakes.

This constant apologizing and demand for apology is a sign of something much deeper than political correctness. It is a sign of infantilism. It is a sign of the Lastman. It is a sign of a people who cannot deal with emotion, with anger, with sadness, with loud words, with disagreement, with opposition. We want to outlaw hate and hate speech, which means we want to flatten out the emotional ride of life. We want to knock out all highs and lows. After we outlaw hatred, perhaps we can outlaw love, since love is also a passion that is often difficult to control. It is scary, it leads to confrontation and distress, to name calling, to wild imaginings and expectations. It often leads to pain. So outlaw it.

You may think I am drawing wild parallels, but contemporary society is moving in this direction as well. "Love speech" is also exponentially more tepid than it used to be. And I am not just talking about compared the Troubadours. No, listen to Frank Sinatra, especially the old stuff (from before the 60's) and you will see the difference. Or Nat King Cole and Tony Bennett. Or, in the 60's, think of Johnny Mathis. You don't even have to go back that far. Go back to the 70's. Love speech in the music and movies was completely different than it is now. Every decade there is more talk of sex and less talk of love. Even where romance remains, it has been pinched and simplified, its richness and extravagance excised, its idealism jettisoned, its caprice informed, its exaggeration tamed.

All this control is in service of the Lastman. The farmer is turning his cow into a hornless beast, a blinking, slow-moving grassy-brained creature only good for milking or sending to the grinder.

But before we wrap this up, let us look at my third example, the poor beast John Kerry. Kerry was talking about education and military service, and meant to imply that people who don't know anything about history end up in stupid wars like the Iraq War. This "joke" was aimed at Bush, obviously. But Kerry left a word out of the punchline, which made it look like he was talking about the soldiers in Iraq, not Bush.

Even if Kerry had been talking about the soldiers, his point should have been well taken, since the point applies equally to them. In general, the most educated people *don't* end up on the front lines of wars, and many of the soldiers in Iraq *don't* appear to know much about history. We know that from the

interviews. Some soldiers are no doubt smart people who do know history, but that is not the point. Kerry's statement, even read incorrectly, is a generalization, and as a generalization, it is true. Statistically, Kerry would have been correct if he had said what Karl Rove had wished he had said.

And that is where we hit the central issue. Kerry's blown punchline was spun by Rove, and Kerry found a way to lose again. Initially, Kerry refused to apologize and attacked Bush and Rove directly. For a shining moment we saw Kerry as a real man. Unfortunately, that shining moment soon paled, and Kerry knelt before Rove and did his bidding. This allowed Rove to double his bet: Kerry was now not only admitting to an infraction (otherwise, why apologize) he was also flip-flopping once more. After refusing to apologize on Monday, he apologized on Tuesday.

A couple of weeks later, after the midterm elections, the media was asking if Kerry could outlive the blown joke.

Kerry had left one word out of a sentence, had been spun into a meaning he didn't intend, and now his career was in jeopardy. How could this happen? How could a society accept the proposal that a miffed sentence was a career-ending gaffe? How could a media propose it? How could a media that had failed to investigate wholesale failures of governance from both parties justify focusing attention on trivia?

Even more to the point, how could the readers of the "news" continue to read it? How could they not permanently cancel all their subscriptions to every magazine and newspapers and online agency? How could they stand there in the field, bitten by flies, chomping on grass and swishing their tails, and not get the tiniest bit bored or suspicious?

Because they are Lastmen. A lifetime of head vises has convinced them that it is unforgivable to get mad, to feel strong emotion, to make mistakes, to love, to hate, to get loud, to make demands, to fight, to be intemperate for any reason, to use certain words, to change their minds, to be different, to take risks. Instead, they stand there and get milked. They put "question authority" bumper stickers on the car, and then drive under surveillance cameras at every intersection, allow their dictionaries to be censored, their mail to be opened, their phones tapped, and their cars searched. They blink contentedly as the Constitution is erased word by word, the banks steal from them, and the oil companies price-fix them into poverty. They watch their fellows being tasered and do nothing. They watch their neighbors being tortured and killed and they do nothing. One can only suppose that they will clip-clop down the chute when it comes their time, and be amazed that security is not at the end of it.

The Value of Copywork



by Miles Mathis

Until about 90 years ago, museum copywork was an integral part of the education of every young painter. Depending on whether you were French, Spanish, or American, a sojourn at the Louvre, Prado, or Metropolitan would have been considered *de rigueur*. Those lucky enough to have wealthy parents, patrons, or sponsors might even have traveled outside the country to find the great works of the past (Italy was, of course, a favorite destination). But the advent of Modernism changed all that. From where we sit, with our simplifying hindsight, it appears that at the very moment Picasso left his Rose Period, an historical lifeline that even the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists respected was cut. The past was no longer the residence of giants upon whose shoulders we might stand (to paraphrase Isaac Newton). Instead it became a dustbin, and our success as artists became measured by how quickly we could relegate our fathers and teachers into it, and how long we could stay out of it.

But artistic indebtedness was not a sin until the present century: Michelangelo was heavily indebted to the Greeks; Rubens was greatly influenced by Michelangelo; Van Dyck copied Titian; the Spaniard Velasquez studied the painters of the Italian Renaissance, especially Caravaggio, and influenced European painting from Goya to Manet. The American William Merritt Chase copied Velasquez in his youth, and John Singer Sargent copied Velasquez as well as the Dutch painter Frans Hals. And what would Rodin have been without Michelangelo before him? In twentieth-century America, the influence of these Old Masters is still felt, but "art history", so called, has gone elsewhere. And it is this "elsewhere" that shows most clearly, I think, that those with the fewests debts also have the fewest assets.

Now, after decades of neglect and abuse, classical painting—and copywork along with it—has seen its ebb-tide and is preparing, one hopes, for a resurgence. There has been an historical break that is not easily remedied. But our museums remain a repository of information and ideas—some them obvious, some esoteric. In this article I hope to inspire others to discover for themselves the great wealth that history still offers those wise enough to seek it. Museums and libraries have been my classrooms—places where I could research from the primary source, where I could work *mano a mano*, literally hand to hand, with the great artists of the past. Like the Protestant Reformation, copywork is a return to direct inspiration, perhaps not divine, but nearly so. One can remove all intermediaries—teachers, critics, editors, dealers (the clergy of aesthetics)—and decide for oneself the importance of Rembrandt or Raphael, Murillo or Zurbaran, Vermeer or Van Dyck. And by purchasing your education wholesale, as it were, you will find that you have also saved time: the more you can control your own progress the more personalized it will be, and thus the more efficient. You know, for example, where your strengths and weaknesses lie. You probably have very specific questions the answers to which would shore up these weaknesses, but no one will tell you what you need to know. Perhaps no one *can*. The trick is to find someone who does know and to pry it out of him. The best place to beg for technical secrets is at the museum, because the artist cannot say no. You set up your easel, and in the process of imitation you begin to understand the process of creation. The information is not told to you; it is intimated, sublimated. Copywork is truly learning with the right side of the brain, for the technique is not rationalized but intuited. And since painting is a capacity of the right-brain, the experience can be felt directly without the interference of the rational left-brain. This is important, for the left-brain is an intermediary just as insidious as the art critic. The great left-brain—master of technology, statistical wizard, birthplace of economics, prime-mover of the modern age—and sour scourge of art. Resist the temptation to overanalyze your work and you will have taken a giant step toward discovering your Muse.

But before you discover your Muse, you must first discover your mentors. By reading widely you can find the artists you most admire. These artists will teach you to paint: then and only then, if you are lucky, your Muse will teach you to create.

Once you have discovered a mentor—an Old Master who inspires you, say—your first step is to find a book about that artist. You should look for a recent publication with as many color photographs as possible. You can buy a book at the bookstore, of course, or you can do your research at the public or university library. If you live in a college town, I highly recommend the fine arts library at the university. The bookstore will have a few of the newer publications (which are lovely if you can afford them), but the university library will have a much larger selection, and you are more likely to get all your work done in one place. Unless you are also a student, you won't be able to check anything out, but since you will just be doing research this won't really matter. Next to the photographs in the book (or in an index at the back) will be listed where the original work is located. This is more likely to be correct and up-to-date in the more recent publications. Works listed as being in museums are less likely to have relocated because of a recent sale than works in a private collection, but always call before you make a long road trip to copy a particular work. Those works still owned by individuals

may be listed as being in "private collections", with no specific information included. But some will list the owner's name. These works are not off-limits to you. If the owner is nearby, give him or her a call. It may be possible, depending on the person, to at least view the work. Many connoisseurs are quite happy to find someone interested in their collections. If, during the meeting, you develop a rapport with the owner, you may be able to get permission to copy. Usually, though, it is much easier to make an appointment to copy with a museum, which is open everyday, than to deal with an individual who will have many other demands on his time. The best thing is to find a beautiful work in a museum nearby. Reasearching a number of artists at once will increase your chances of finding an inspirational work.

If you find, despite your best efforts, that all your mentors' works are in London or Madrid or St Petersburg, for example, remember that almost every major city has a museum of fine art. You will be surprised at what masterpieces many of them have, especially in storage. In order to discover exactly what these museums have, it is necessary to find a catalog of the complete inventory. Again, the library will have many of these. Or you can send off to the museum for a catalog. You will probably find that the museum just up the road has a number of pieces that interest you.

In choosing a work, it is important to keep in mind what you are trying to learn. This will vary from trip to trip, but constantly reassessing your own development will help you choose works that are likely to answer questions you need answered now. Especially, do not overreach yourself. It is important that each session be a positive one. For me, I find it helps to isolate a single problem and to concentrate on an area in a painting that can be copied in one day. For instance, with John S. Sargent's *Venetian Beggar Girl* (Dallas Museum of Art),



I was interested in the overall looseness of the brushwork. I did this copy very soon after beginning to use oils and my goal was to learn to handle a brush the way Sargent did. Therefore, the small scale of the painting (24 by 18) and its nearly monochromatic palette allowed me to isolate brushwork as my exercise. It also allowed me to have a complete painting at the end of four hours—a painting that I would always have as a reminder of what I knew and how I knew it.

A couple of years later I went back to Sargent (*Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, Tate Gallery, London)—this time for color.



Again, I chose an area I could copy at one sitting—in this case about a quarter of the painting. I was interested in the way Sargent had worked the little girl into the background, not with detail, but with bright yet unexaggerated complementary colors, especially orange and green.

At about the same time, I did a partial copy of Bouguereau's *Admiration* (San Antonio Museum of Art).



Once again, the canvas is 24 x 18, and I worked for about four hours. This gave me time to bring the skintones to a fairly high degree of finish. Since Bouguereau used minimal glazing or overpainting in his faces, this is all I needed. The trick to copying a Bouguereau, I discovered, lay more in the choice of undertone, the absorbency of the canvas, and the choice of white to use as the base skintone. I had the wrong white, which made it impossible to match his style no matter what else I did.

Of course, you may plan an exercise that can't be completed in one sitting, but I find that many of those who spend weeks and months exactly copying large detailed works lose the ability to treat the experience as an exercise. It instead becomes hero worship—replication rather than the passing of a torch. This should be avoided at all costs. I might mention, however, that you should not be afraid of being unoriginal or derivative while you are learning to paint. All of us who learned to play chopsticks on the piano as children were not derivative. We were simply young. You must allow yourself to go through a learning phase where you are not very good and not very inventive. Because to become good and inventive you must first learn to paint. To again use the musical analogy, if you want to write

music you have to learn the scales. If you want to paint you must first become technically proficient at applying paint to the canvas. This is simply a fact.

Once you have chosen a work to copy, the next step is to contact the museum. Sometimes you can get all the information you need over the phone. Unfortunately, just as often you get the run around. Copywork is rare outside of New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. (and it is rare in these places, now, too), and an administrator or curator at a smaller museum may not know his museum's policy of admission. You may be told that copywork is not allowed when in fact it is. Don't give up until you have written a letter to the director stating that you are a student (you don't have to be enrolled anywhere or look eighteen) and that you are copying for your own edification (as opposed to copying for resale). This should get you in.

If you are interested in copying a work in storage, you will need to get special permission from the director or curator. An appointment will have to be made to give the museum time to find the work and to prepare it for copy. All museums should have public access to stored works, provided you make an appointment well in advance. Some will require references. But, of course, actual policy will vary depending on the museum. For instance, the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, despite being a first-rate collection, allows no copywork, ever. This is unfortunate, for it displays not only a large gap in commitment to public service, but also a forced break in the history of art: if the young artists of today can't learn from the past, what will fill the museums of tomorrow? If you encounter other such instances, I encourage you to complain vociferously. It is just another example of how our artistic heritage, and the past in general, is being entombed.

Now, some specific recommendations:

Always take an assortment of canvases. You may change your mind about what to copy once you see the complete collection, or decide to copy more than one painting. Also, museums rarely let you copy at the same size as the original: you either have to copy a detail or blow the full-size canvas up or down by two or three inches. So build your canvases accordingly.

If you are copying a work painted before 1900, it helps to have your canvas already toned (to about the color of raw linen). White grounds were not used much before the present century. I have found that the color of the ground is usually not as important as its value (its darkness). Just throw a turpentine wash of raw umber or some other mid-tone over your white canvas. If you paint on a white canvas, it will be hard to match your values to a painting on a toned ground. Also, I highly recommend you use white lead as your ground when copying old works. If you want to match their effects, you must match their supplies, and I assure you that none of them were painting on acrylic gesso. If you are lazy, you can always paint a thin layer of white lead right over the top of your pre-stretched gesso, and then tone it. This gives you a quick fix, and provides a ground with less absorbency. Your brush is then more likely to skate nicely across your canvas like the old masters.

Always take a clean cloth tarp to put under your easel. The museums are not impressed by a dirty tarp, because they have no way of knowing whether all the paint on it is dry or not. So take a clean tarp

large enough to cover the floor under you and your easel. That way you can put your paint box on the floor, and with your palette on your arm the only furniture you need is your easel.

Invest in a sturdy collapsible easel. Only the major museums (like the Metropolitan) furnish an easel. I recommend a sturdy wooden easel with three collapsible legs. Daniel Smith has a nice one that is not very heavy for about ninety dollars. It is much lighter than a "French" easel, and if you are not a watercolorist you don't need the trays and the horizontal capability. Obviously, if you are copying a watercolor, you may want to spend a little more for the French easel. [But be forewarned that most museums do not allow copying in watercolors. Water is a greater danger to old paintings than even oil paint—which can be easily removed with turps.] It goes without saying that you can also build an easel, but sometimes the hardware is hard to find. I have never built a portable easel, but I did build my studio easel, and the hardware for it could not be had for love or money. I ended up "borrowing" the hardware from a broken easel that had been pitched out into the courtyard of the art building at the university. As artists we must be creative in so many ways.

Take a paper bag or a piece of cloth to wrap your used brushes in. You don't want to have to clean all your brushes at the museum.

Take a small box of pastels and conte crayons. If the museum absolutely refuses to give you permission to paint, you can almost always draw instead. For some exercises this is just as good. When I copied Sir Anthony Van Dyck's *Corneliis van der Geest* (National Gallery, London) I couldn't get permission to copy in oils on the same day.



I was in a hurry, so I did a drawing instead. Since I was interested in how Van Dyck had captured the old man's character through lighting, detail, and color, pastels worked very well.

Finally, don't forget the importance of drawings. Drawing is not only the basis of painting, it is also an exercise worth doing for its own sake, or for the sake of beauty. And unlike paintings, drawings can be copied with a great deal of success from photographs in books (especially charcoal and pencil drawings). Line quality can be copied and learned both for its own sake and as it relates to brushwork. Developing expressive line quality will help you develop expressive brushwork. In copying drawings, choice of paper is very important. You must match the texture very closely in order to match the line quality. In this the only tools you have are intuition and trial and error. I matched the effect of Peter Paul Rubens drawing *Daniel in the Lion's Den* (National Gallery, Washington, D.C.) with a sheet of Japanese Kitakata that I first dusted with charcoal and rubbed heavily to effectively "antique" it. Then a piece of willow charcoal, fairly well sharpened, gave me the line quality I wanted.



Copying teaches you the importance of the surface and tools in creating an effect, whether with charcoal or paint. Matching brushwork is more than just loosening or tightening your wrist, for example. In copying an artist like Sargent you must have fairly oily paint and a very smooth, non-absorbent canvas. Whereas if you wanted to copy the great Russian painter Nicolai Fechin, you would have to blot all the oil out of the paint and use a canvas with more tooth. You would also have to give up your filbert for a bright and a painting knife. Learning these technical aspects can save you much frustration. Many students blame themselves for lack of skill where the only problem is incompatible paints, brushes, canvases, and desires.

Remember, too, that technique is just a tool. Once you have mastered technique, then you must teach yourself to create. This you can learn from no one. The ultimate goal is to justify your technique by putting it in the service of your ideas, and to attain a level where these ideas have a quality all their own. In the end, what one learns from the masters that is most important is that great artists are not just virtuosos or brilliant technicians. Nor, as we have had ample evidence in the 20th century, are they simply groundbreakers, visionaries, or ideamen. History teaches us that they must be both: masters of an expressive medium with ideas of a depth and sophistication worthy of expression.

Currin Again

by Miles Mathis



[go to first Currin article from 2004.](#) [go to second Currin article from 2004.](#)

I am but mad north by northwest:
when the wind is southerly, I know
a hawk from a handsaw.—*Shakespeare*

February 13, 2008

In this latest winter of our discontent, the desperation of the New York avant garde is reaching new and perhaps final levels of gassiness. Realizing that they once again, for the 92nd year in row, have nothing to write about or look at worth writing about or looking at, they return, as if by rote, to John Currin, their last best, though pathetically shallow, hope. One can only hope, with pathos and bathos, it is their last.

Now, Currin himself admitted going into a funk—or what he called a “dry spell”—in 2004, after his success at the Whitney and all his big-city write-ups. It wasn’t very good timing for a dry spell, since Gagosian had just taken him away from Andrea Rosen and raised his prices into the exosphere. Two years later, in 2006, Currin had a small show at Gagosian which did not even come close to selling out. Many of the paintings are still listed at the Gagosian website. Beyond that, none of his works since 2003 are nearly as interesting—even as illustration—as his earlier things like *Hobo* and *Sno-bo*. He has developed a heightened interest in technique, as we shall see, and his technique has gotten a bit better in the meantime. But it appears that he has long since emptied his narrow quiver.

Not to worry, the avant garde has never needed actual artworks to go on. It subsists entirely on the write-ups and always has, and if breasts are sagging or members are flagging, they just spill more ink in more high-tone places. Hence we find another long pointless paean in the *New Yorker*, to follow similar things in *GQ* and *Penthouse* and lord knows where else. A small, sad show in London is the proffered occasion this time, but that is just an excuse for another blubbing tour through the fashionable townhouse and a rehash of the resume.

The readers and writers of contemporary magazines—these Leviathans of taste and culture—don’t know art from garfunkel, but they hunger for pictures of the artist and his family and his bed and his studio and his wine cellar and his bookshelf and his palm pilot and his tie collection. And they thirst for gossip about his past and his future and his prices and his dog and his childhood sweethearts and his suits. To them it matters not what Currin has or has not painted, it only matters who he has married and what parties he goes to and whether he is the 19th best dressed man on the East Coast or the 20th, and how tall he is.

I would have been too shagged out from chronic malaise to comment on this, except that Currin says a couple of exceedingly stupid things here, even stupider than usual (even stupider than the avant garde artist is usually paid to say) and this put me in the mood to write.

As it turns out, Currin is now so desperate for relevance that he is trying to tie his recent pornographic output to world politics. Let me lead by saying I don’t care that he is painting porn. It doesn’t offend me; it doesn’t impress me. I look at nudity and sex on the internet and sometimes enjoy it. The difference is I would never try to defend my art, or apologize for my sex-gazing, by tying it to politics of any kind. But for some reason Currin finds this necessary. He says,

I know how right wing this sounds . . . but I was thinking how pornography could be a superstitious offering to the gods of a dying race.

No, John, that doesn’t sound right wing, it just sounds phony. It is the among the worst-disguised fake philosophy of the last decade (and has a lot of competition in that regard). And it doesn’t even make sense. As far as this “dying race” is the race of people with white European ancestry (this must be what he means, in context), the gods of this race would not and could not be propitiated by such an offering. If this race is dying then it is dying because its gods are Mammon and Moloch, not Isis or Aphrodite or Freyja. Our gods are not big-dicked totems or cow-uddered rock carvings and haven’t been for

millennia. Those gods are buried deep in the earth and you couldn't raise them by a century of sex or a pile of porn to the moon.

Currin can't really think he is being superstitious or religious, but even if he did he would be very confused. A chrome and enamel flat in Soho is not the first place one would think to go to build a pagan altar to the earthy gods. If Currin is trying to score points in some heaven, his checks from Sadie Coles and Gagosian and his deification by Robert Rosenblum and Peter Schjeldahl are not going to be outweighed on the scales by a million hecatombs of burning oxen or by a billion beddings of Erato.

And they especially are not going to be outweighed by such tepid and ugly images as the new porn series. *Sno-bo* was a thousand times sexier than these new copulation shots (and even she is not going to score high with the Muses—as I have it from them directly). Of all the porn to pick, why this?



Currin tells us he painted this because of the twelve Danish newspaper cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad and “the killing of Theo van Gogh, the film director, by some jihadist in Amsterdam—all of a sudden the most liberal societies in the world were having intimidation murders happen. That's when it occurred to me that we might lose this thing—not the Iraq war but the larger struggle.”

As if that weren't enough and more than enough, he continued,

I'm gonna have a fucking fatwa on me for saying this, but I had a kind of cockamammy political idea that this is what we're fighting the Islamists with: They've got the Koran, and we've got the best porn ever made! I mean that as a joke but also as something that's literally true. . . .In the European theater the question seemed to be, “Who's going to win? Allah or porn?” Personally, I hope we win. I hope porn wins.

Didn't Currin have some sort of veto clause in this interview? Some sort of emergency small-print that allowed him a late self-edit just in case he started quoting Rush Limbaugh or started channeling Danny Bonaduce from the *Partridge Family*, Season 2? I mean, good god, what is this about a "European theater"? Does he mean the cineplex in Hamburg, or is he leaning over a map in his basement, moving around toy soldiers and Sherman tanks?

Just to be clear, these quotes don't sound either left or right to me. They sound like Currin has been scouted by the CIA, and the CIA is (officially) non-partisan. Currin lives in NYC and has eyes and ears. Almost seven years after 911, he can't really believe that the Muslims are the enemy in any real "theater", or that Islam is the primary threat to world peace. No, his "dying race" is that threat, and everyone knows it, or should. Outside the US, this knowledge is nearly unanimous. I just lived in Belgium for three years, and I can tell you that white Europeans, even the ones who want the Muslims to live somewhere else, don't think any nation of Islam is the primary aggressor in the world. The Dutch and Flemish nationalists may want uni-culturalism above all else, but unless they are also with covert operations—like Theo van Gogh was (is)—they aren't denying that the US is the empire on the move. Europeans have their own sort of blindered and blinkered view: they no longer see themselves as the problem—since we in the US have taken on that mantle. In their eyes, they are not the dying race, *we* are. Like the Native Americans, the Europeans are waiting for us to commit cultural suicide, so that they can pick up the pieces. We may be the great great grandchildren to these Europeans, but we left the house long ago. We aren't their concern anymore. They can deny the blood link, if it comes down to it. In their opinion, we are committing cultural suicide by spreading empire too far, too fast, and with no finesse. They know that in the tally of "intimidation murders" we have no competitors, in this century or any other. We left the Huns and the Romans behind us decades ago. Even the Germans look at us like a newly minted race, capable of things even they never thought of.

But it should not be necessary to live abroad to have some inkling of this. I hear that the internet may now be available in Manhattan. Currin is sold as avant, cutting edge, smart-as-a-whip, Yale-educated, Jewish married, and so on; but he still gets his news straight from the White House or Rupert Murdoch, apparently. This doesn't make him rightist, necessarily; it makes him either an idiot or a plant.

We will assume he is not an idiot. We will assume that he is using words like "cockamamy" only to seem like a friendly rube, appealing to the common man that reads the *New Yorker*. But that begs the question if he is getting his politics from his in-laws. All this talk of Theo van Gogh and Islamic jihadists and so on sounds an awful lot like Alan Dershowitz. I don't think Dershowitz has ever pulled porn into the mix like this, but otherwise the similarities are striking. The hawks, Jewish and non-Jewish, always find a way to focus on the one guy in Holland instead of the thousands or millions with our mark on them.

Like his handlers—whoever they are—John has to pretend to be more concerned with one or two "intimidation murders" in "liberal societies" than he is with millions of murders in Iraq and around the world. For him, the question is not Iraq, it is the "larger struggle" of porn against Allah.

This can only be seen as a perverse new twist in the globalist bi-partisan Jewish/Christian/Atheist propaganda machine to sell pre-emptive and continuous war as “a guarantee of freedom.” We are not murdering innocent men, women, and children just for oil, we are doing it for porn.

Well, John, that really sells it for me, boy. I had thought we were doing it for some selfish reasons—so that we could continue to drive our Hummers, for instance, and talk on our cellphones and drink bottled water. But no, it is so that we can continue to masturbate with full rights and a clean conscience. The fertility gods must smile upon such actions. What do they care if hundreds of thousands of foreigners conceived in sex are starved and killed in forests of famine and lakes of blood, as long as we follow it by a Soho sacrifice to Frigg? One or two shitty paintings should buy us a quick indulgence, a guarantee of a touchdown or two, and a convincing win in the war for “democracy.”

Do I expect anyone else will call him on this, especially from the so-called left? Not a chance. In the “American theater”, there is no left, at least not in the art scene or in the journals. The progressivism of the avant garde is just a pose, a marketing ploy. When it gets right down to it, these people have all the creative courage of a Hallmark Card or a member of Congress.

In championing any kind of freedom, even the freedom to masturbate, Currin will be hailed as a hero of the left. Worldwide mass murders don’t register with these people. Republican and Democrat, Jew and Gentile, they hold hands and sing God Bless America while robbing the poor box to buy more bombs. Even 3000 of their own murdered, in their own home town, by their own government, can be ignored as inconsequential next to the freedom to masturbate and make false offerings to silly gods. Some radical feminist at the *Village Voice* can attack Currin for painting big tits, that is, but don’t expect anyone to attack him for parroting CIA handbills or for sounding like a commercial for the Department of Defense. The Pentagon-Porn alliance: “Fighting Terrorists, one Fuck at a Time!”

But let’s switch gears and actually look at the paintings. I know this will shock the avant garde: actually having to look at the images without a pre-set screen, a playbook, or a list of platitudes. But it occurs to me it might be helpful.

Here is what Currin says about them:

I’ve always felt insecure about being a figurative artist, and about being an American painter. My technique is in no way comparable to that of a mid-level European painter of the 19th century. They had way more ability and technical assurance.

As I pointed out several years ago, in each interview Currin always passes through a tiny window of clarity and says at least one thing that is true. In this interview, this is it. We would be tempted to give him some credit for humility or insight, except that we remember him saying in those other interviews that he wanted to be famous and to get lots of attention. In this one we are told he is right where he wants to be, so it is difficult to work up much empathy for him. We could take this quote as some sort of admission of bad faith, but it makes more sense to take it like [the British portrait painter] [Stuart Pearson Wright’s admission](#) that the avant garde is right about a lot of things. Especially as regards that first sentence: the avant garde *expects* figurative painters to be insecure, and Currin is good enough to

oblige them. They have spent half of every year's budget for 80 years being sure that figurative painters were insecure, or worse, and Currin would never have been allowed into the game if he didn't play along. Even if he *weren't* insecure, there is likely a clause in his contract that requires him to say he *is* at least five times a year.

Jed Perl at the *New Republic* has been even harder on Currin than Currin pretends to be on himself. He calls Currin's paintings,

Mousy imitations of old master portrait styles that would not earn him a freelance gig as a magazine illustrator.

Strong, but too strong. This is precisely where Currin should be, supposing he could find a magazine that needed nearly nude cartoons in the snow. Currin has an illustrator's style as well as an illustrator's mind and level of creativity. He cannot give a face any real depth or life, but he can certainly produce figures that are interesting in their own limited ways. You wouldn't want to look at *Sno-bo* everyday: she would wear pretty thin, so to speak. But you don't mind looking once or twice. She's cute and clever, and it would be pointless to deny it. Is she a damn good illustration? Yes. Is she worth a million dollars? No.

To show *why* I think this is so, in even greater detail, let us look at what has been called his best recent painting, by critics and non-critics alike. A portrait of his son.



I agree that this is one of his best works. It has a certain charm. It is not phony in any way. It is the kind of straightforward painting we wish he were allowed to do, and would do. But of course if he did this sort of thing all the time, he wouldn't be where he is. He would be where I am.

And if he were where I am, then people would have to look a bit harder at this work. Compared to his other work, it is a gem. Compared to any good portrait, it is a failure. Why? You may think it is due to

some technical problem. This is how the other portrait painters would critique it; and the painting does have problems technically, as I will show in a minute. But that is not why I think it fails. It fails because the little boy is not alive. The eyes are dead. Remember how Michael Kimmelman put it in his *New York Times* review in 2003: “Eyes in Mr. Currin’s work tend to be black holes, sucking up light.” Back then this was considered a bit of flattery. The avant garde *wants* people looking like mannequins, since this plays into their critique of society. But Currin has not found it easy to turn off his “critical distance” or his sangfroid or whatever it is. He has created no connection here to his own son. The boy looks like a pretty doll.

Currin is finally beginning to learn some of the technical tricks of the old masters, but he still hasn’t learned the cardinal rule of traditional painting: you have to make the face *live*. He should have studied Van Dyck or Titian instead of Velasquez’s *Infantas*. Velasquez painted the princesses as little dolls, just like this, and that is why no one likes them as much as his portraits of the dwarfs or his other friends at court. Currin has an unerring instinct for the lifeless and mannered, so that even when he goes to Velasquez—the right teacher, in many ways—he still ends up with an emotional nullity.

The eyes are the main problem, since they have no life or sparkle. Part of this is strictly technical. The eyeballs need to curve and the irises need touch lights and color variation and so on. But it is more than that, since the mouth also has no expression. You could add a lot of technical tricks to liven up the *paint* of the mouth, but it would still have no expression because Currin photographed the boy when he was not expressing anything. The boy is very pretty, and nattily dressed, but the mood of the piece is flat.

Currin also doesn’t know what he is doing with his light. He doesn’t have enough tonal variation in the skin to create a real curvature, and this is because he is lighting from the wrong angle. He has only two basic tones in his skin. He has no real highlights and no real shadows. This is what flattens out the face and makes it look like an illustration.

Then look at what he does with the background. He has chosen a good color, but he doesn’t appear to know what to do when it meets the figure. He just takes it up to the edge of the figure and lets it stop. It looks like a pastel sketch or something. This is why the little boy looks pasted onto the canvas. He doesn’t really live in that background, it just hangs around him, flatly.

Currin has this problem with all his edges here. It is because they didn’t teach him anything at Yale and he is having to re-invent the wheel. He is scared to go wet into wet, but you have to overlap and repaint to get these edges to blend.

To be fair, he has also done a lot of things right here. His color harmony is lovely. He hasn’t felt a need to over-saturate, as so many realists now do. His drawing is very good. The hair has a nice degree of finish, not too much not too little. And he has picked a fetching costume. All these things take real talent, and Currin is not without talent. But because, up to now, he has been more interested in getting rich and famous than in learning how to paint, he has what he would be expected to have: a big bank account and an unimpressive *oeuvre*.

Just to put to rest all these claims of mastery and direct comparisons to the greats, let's look at a close-up of one of his better-known paintings.



There is nothing wrong with that as a piece of illustration, but don't tell me it compares to Caravaggio or Sargent. Ignoring subject matter and just looking at paint quality, anyone who has ever held a brush will tell you Currin has only a tithe of the depth or complexity of even the worst of the real painters of history. Currin admits it himself, above. And this illustrative technique was chosen on purpose. It is *not* a failing. If he really achieved the complexity and depth of the Old Masters, he would be thrown out of the avant garde as a dangerous virus. They can't have that. They allow this mocking downgrade of realism in order to undercut realism. Currin's technique is not an homage or a return to mastery, it is intentional propaganda *against* mastery. This is its use to the avant garde. Surely Currin understands that.

Let's return for a moment to *Sno-bo*. Notice that I do Currin the favor of looking at his best work. It is a work that is very popular and it is a work that I like. Arthur Danto of *The Nation* says this of *Hobo* and *Sno-bo*:

The two figures are exceedingly mysterious. . . .As paintings they have the power to hold us in front of them, contemplating meanings too fragile and remote for application to life.



Come on! “Exceedingly mysterious”? “Meanings too fragile and remote”? I like the paintings, but I don’t see any mystery or anything remote there. They’re clever cartoons, made specially for guys who like their women skinny and blonde. I do, but I can’t pretend there is anything mysterious about it, particularly when I am looking at these cartoons. I thought that was the whole point of them. Not to mystify, but to de-mystify. Danto doesn’t even know how to look at an image, much less take the artist at his word. If Currin had been trying consciously or unconsciously to plumb some depths of sex or desire, do you think he would have chosen this subject to paint, or given it such a perfectly inane title? Currin is no doubt satisfied to allow such misreadings, since they make the painting bigger and more expensive than it is. But they remain egregious misreadings.

As another example of Danto’s complete missing of every point, lets look at another quote:

One cannot become a Mannerist as a matter of stylistic decision. One has to allow talents to show that have been held in check all along.

Just the opposite of the truth, as usual. If he would only ask Currin, I am sure Currin would tell him that the mannerist style that he borrowed was borrowed as a “stylistic decision,” with full premeditation. In fact, this used to be the understanding about Currin’s style. It was good precisely because it was premeditated, and therefore false. If it had been genuine, if it had been arrived at in any natural way, it would not have been accepted by the avant garde, by places like the Whitney and the Guggenheim and MoMA. The Whitney has it in writing somewhere, I think, that no earnestness in style will be tolerated. If you are not a tongue-in-cheek realist, you are a real realist, in which case you are a danger, a pariah, and a potential terrorist.

In fact, Currin is on very dangerous ground with this portrait of his son, and I think he knows it. That is precisely why he was careful to surround it with large canvases of porn and other ironic swagger in his

show. The avant garde may forgive him for one or two portraits of his son, as a sample of aberrant behavior or a temporary sign of madness. But he best not make a habit of it.

Odd Nerdrum is in precisely the same boat, a boat floating three feet above the water—so that no paddle may reach it. One of Nerdrum's best-loved paintings is the one of his daughter Amo.



The child in this painting is fully alive, full of emotion, and painted with complete technical knowledge and assurance. But Nerdrum is in the same boat as Currin, since he cannot paint this sort of thing everyday. It is allowed only once in a blue moon. It must be surrounded by hooded freaks flexing their feet and chanting at the moon. If Nerdrum painted all his subjects in a straightforward manner, without manufactured mythologies and premeditated weirdnesses, he would still be struggling in obscurity, fenced out of the upper echelon of contemporary art which is Pluralism. *Amo* wasn't Nerdrum's entrée into the big time, it was paintings of one-armed hermaphrodites and nudes dumping in the woods.

Let me simplify this for you even more. Why is Currin in a higher price range? you may ask. 1) Nerdrum is better technically: but that doesn't matter, since almost no one can see that. These major critics have compared Currin to everyone from Parmigianino to Sargent, so it is clear they are just dropping names. For them, any realist head is pretty much equivalent to any other: the hierarchy from Alex Katz to Titian is invisible to them, even as a sheer matter of technique. 2) Currin and Nerdrum both paint weird things, so in that regard we have a tie. In the avant garde, you are either in or you are out, and they are weird enough to be in. The hierarchies once you are in don't have anything to do with the actual art. You can have a brick on the floor or a 20-foot canvas with six perfectly painted figures. The latter will not score you any extra points, and it may actually harm you. But Currin and Nerdrum

are similar enough in the eyes of the avant garde that we have no separation here. 3) The whole reason Nerdrum is not as famous or expensive as Currin is that Nerdrum is in Iceland, not New York City; he is not married to the daughter of a Jewish dermatologist who he found in a faux gingerbread house in a gallery in Soho; and he doesn't go to parties with Mick Jagger and Marc Jacobs and Chloe Sevigny, wearing two thousand dollar suits. Nerdrum is still so naïve and un-American that he actually spends his time painting. He should quit jacking off and come sleep with Larry Gagosian or Mary Boone or someone.

As a closer, I want to look at one more quote of Currin from this interview in the *New Yorker*:

The way things are painted trumps everything else.

This is given us as a reward at the very end of the article, as if it is very deep. But not only is it not deep, it is not true. Ironically, it does push Currin in line with Sargent, at least for a moment. Eleanor Heartney in *Art in America* has claimed that Currin's style has something in common with Sargent's style, but that is absurd. Currin has nothing in common with Sargent but this quote. When Sargent was at Broadway, Worcestershire, about the time he was painting *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, he said something very much like this. He said that it wasn't so much what you painted as how you painted it, and he attempted to prove it by setting up his easel in a field at random and painting whatever was in front of him. It didn't last for long, of course, since that was all balderdash. *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* is one of the most manufactured things ever painted. It took months of model time for the two girls, frozen in place every day at the same time, 15 minutes before sunset. This is how real paintings are made. They aren't accidents. And they aren't paint samples, either. The way things are painted doesn't matter at all, unless they are painted poorly. The subject and the treatment of the subject are what matter.

There are dozens of perfectly good and serviceable styles and methods in the history of figure painting. Some are tight, some loose, some outlined, some blended, some alla prima, some layered, some with high color, some with little color. None of these methods is necessarily superior to any other. As far as they are permanent, and express what needed to be expressed, they are artistically equivalent.

The perfect example of this is Currin himself. Currin's technique is not perfect, but Currin's main problem is not his technique. Currin's main problem is his subject matter. Most of the time he is piecing together weird stuff he has found, in order to impress some critic or jury. Except when he is painting his son, he is not painting anything meaningful to him. Even his wife is used as a cut-out to be pushed in some way. He is always using her to make some clever statement or composition; he is never just painting *her*. I haven't seen a straightforward portrait of her, (although I would like to). The closest he has come is *Rachel in Fur*.



But she is wearing those stupid purple sunglasses. Even here he is pushing his subject to appeal to modern standards and requirements. It is as if he can't turn off the self-conscious games and asides for a moment. It isn't enough for him—because it isn't enough for the avant garde—to just paint a face because he loves it. Such a reason has no social relevance. What can a critic say about a thing like that? What hook can a dealer use to sell it?

Dante contra Danto



by Myles Mathis

I see no reason for an introduction, no reason to ease you, the gallant reader, through three cozy and coddling paragraphs, chummy with ingratiating adjectives and warm-hearted with anecdote, to get to the kill. Where we are going it is better to leap. Straight to the ninth circle of hell, fourth ring. Judecca. The Pit. Where Lucifer licks his lips.

We have descended through fire and darkness, and already we have arrived. Our guide (not Virgil but Vincent, in a pale-blue peasant frock clogged with paint) points through the vapors and mists and we see the Blackest Souls of All, buried in mid-gasp in the solid blue ice, not even a nose poking from the freeze. We look for acquaintances, old junior-high teachers, maybe, or CEO's. Even they do not merit such distinction. But soft, what soundless pool of Cocytus lies here, awash with bodies moving not, speaking not, speak though they would? Our fiery-haired guide van Gogh enlightens us: ah, they are the art critics. See, there is Ruskin, a farthing frozen to each eyelid. And Greenberg, staring ever at the lovely flatness of the translucent surface only itches from his face. And what is this? Arthur Danto, like Fra Alberigo and Branca Doria, still alive on earth but already in hell? Van Gogh explains:

"This icy place you see, my friends," he says, blowing smoke and patting a crushed velveteen cap that sits on his head like a toy dog, "this, the inmost ring of the inmost circle, is reserved for traitors against

their benefactors. The art critic is dependent for his livelihood on what field? Art, of course, Eh? Certainly. And art is created by?—yes, artists. We alone, *fidus Achates*.

Well then, as Socrates might continue, what is the primary product of the field of art? Criticism or art? Art. Can art exist without criticism? Yes. Can criticism exist without art? No. Artists, as a whole, make possible criticism, and thereby the critic. Reasonable, Eh! *Raisonnable?*

Donc, the artist *en general* is the benefactor of the critic. Logically, no critic would be here for attacking an artist. That is to say, an individual artist. This is clear. Clear as ice, *n'est-ce pas?* A critic is a traitor only by undermining art as a whole, purposefully, for his own gain. Only by attacking the history of art, the foundation of art, and thereby all artists, is a critic a traitor. Only in this way does he become the damned of the damned.

"I have Danto's file right here," continues Vincent, taking a swig of absinthe from a sweating flask and grinning like a sky of stars. "Full of the most horrible heresies, shocking really the level of presumption that one man can attain, but only one document is necessary. Necessary and sufficient, one might say. The book, *Embodied Meanings*, the Introduction, page 12. *Alors*, after telling us that he moved from philosophy (as a university professor) to criticism because 'I wanted to become famous in a way which went beyond having a reputation among philosophers,' Danto said this:

I thought in particular that Warhol (though not Warhol alone) had brought within art the question of its true philosophical nature~namely, how something can be a work of art while something else which resembles it as much as Brillo Box resembles a carton of Brillo, is not art. That is like asking how two experiences can be exactly alike while one is dreamt and the other real. Nothing internal to the pair will account for the difference.... One needs a theory of the real, against which to talk about dream, in the one case, or art, in the other. And it struck me at some point with the force of revelation that this problem could not have been raised as a philosophical problem within art at any earlier moment in the history of art: it was as though there were some internal historical development in the course of which art came to a kind of philosophical self-awareness of its own identity. In a curious and somewhat perverse way, I thought, art has turned into philosophy.... From now on the task is up to philosophers, who know how to think in the required way.

"If it were not in print," adds Vincent, tooting his pipe and peeling paint from his tie, "no one would believe that a man could leave such incriminating evidence. *C'est incroyable*. To be so transparently self-serving was once a sign of poor writing, a tactical failure, if nothing more. And a sentence like the next to last one is positively Freudian: does the phrase 'in a curious and somewhat perverse way' modify 'has turned' or 'I thought'? What do you think, Eh? *Comique?* And yet all this stands unquestioned on earth. Danto is famous, as he wished.

Vincent seems to lose himself for a moment as he adjusts and readjusts his cap, like a fetish. "See this chapeau? Drole, no? I won it off Duchamp in a game of chess. The man has no imagination. He plays like one of your modern robots. Zip, zip, zip, I hit him with some moves he won't see in a book and he's finished. Forty years learning a lousy game and he can't even beat a stupid Dutchman. That's hell, Eh? But where was I? *Ah oui, le petit litterateur. Mes amis*, does it take a dead artist to see the level of

sacrilege involved in a philosopher seeing himself as the end of art's 'internal historical development.' It is a 'revelation' to Danto that the question of art being subsumed within philosophy could not have been raised until he, a philosopher, raised it. *Tres bien!*

"When he was brought here, before the judges, he whimpered in cross examination, pointing his finger at the white-haired one, that it was not him, but Warhol, who raised it. But we reminded him of page 7, *ibid.*, where he bragged, 'I was the father of that theory.' Danto cannot argue that he is mis-contextualized or 'judged from a detail.' He contextualizes himself for us, *merci*, in this his own introduction, admits that this is where his fame lies, explains his own theory. He says: 'A whole history is finished.' And 'A great narrative ended in 1964.' *Quoi?* What was 1964? Page 7 again: 'I was invited to talk on the philosophy of art at the American Philosophical Association meetings that year—it was 1964—though I'm afraid nobody much understood what I was trying to say.'

Oh, *sans doute*, someone understood, have no fear. See that three-headed fellow over there slobbering on Brutus and Cassius? *He* understood.

"Oh how!, *mes confreres*, how can a non-artist, a man never touched by the Muse, a chandala for all the Muses, how can he replace inspiration with cognition, replace doing with thinking, redefining history around his only ability, and find himself heroic for it? He has helped kill a thing of beauty for the aggrandizement of theory, and he revels in it. *Il l'amuse*. But let me quote," says Vincent, now sputtering with the cold, waving his arms and skating across the ice in his huge muddy clogs over the very heads of the inert critics, "Let *me* quote one of the other tour guides down here, a chap who went mad at the same time as me, another benefactor of that fellow Danto [Danto has also written a book on Nietzsche, but there is no double jeopardy in hell, no double "forever"]:

Nature, which gave the bull his horns and the lion his chasm odonton [his mouthful of teeth], why did nature give me my foot?...To kick, Holy Anacreon! and not only for running away; for kicking to pieces these rotten armchairs, this cowardly contemplativeness, this lascivious historical eunuchism, this flirting with aesthetic ideals, this justice-tartuffery of impotence.

"*Mon Dieu!*" yells Vincent, getting down on his hands and knees to face the entombed cube of Danto, caught forever immobile in a vast leering grimace. "Art is not theory, you pompous bastard! Do you hear? Art is Emotion! Art is Passion! Art is making art. Idiot! *Putain!*" Vincent gets up and looks around, stomping his feet. "Where is Cellini? If he and I could have just one more round with these fellows before the Big Guy gets them. *Salauds!*

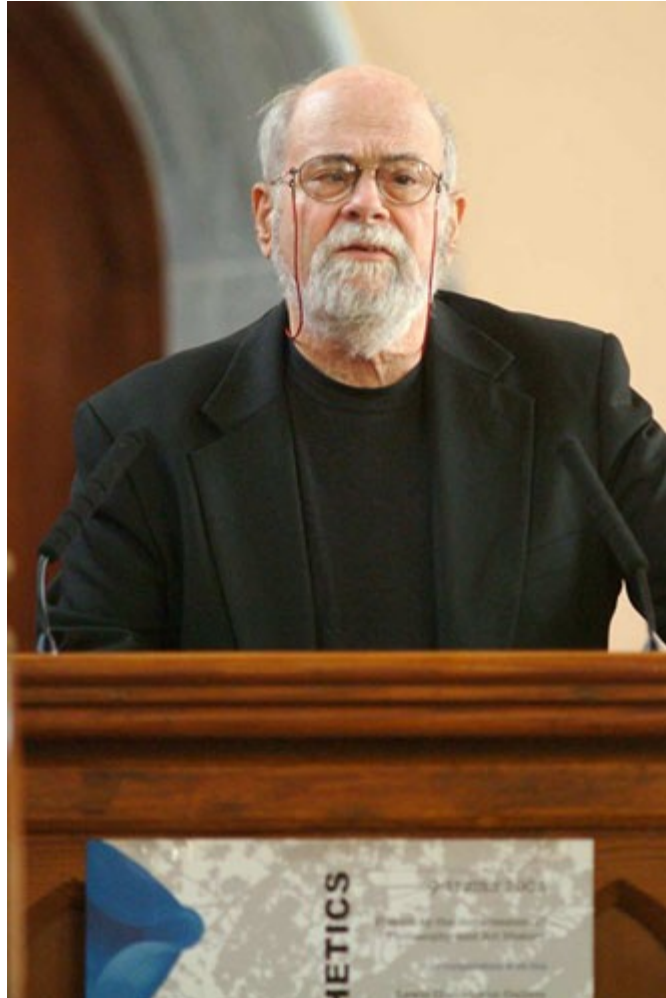
"Benvenuto! Leave Pollock alone and bring your fists over here, you great Baboon! Oh well, we don't have time to melt them out anyway. But this ice is too good for them, I say! *Diablies!* Frozen are you? Hah! Is freezing punishment for a man whose ability to love is already gone, like hoarfrost? A man who can admire only his own eyeballs? Let him live! Let him live to see his precious theories ridiculed by those who can create, and will, no matter how many of his ilk say "all that" is over. Let him live to see a frozen block of marble, merely touched by Michelangelo, or a weave of linen dusted with oily dirt, merely brushed by Rembrandt, outlive him over and over and over. Let him wander like Ahasuerus, till he comprehend the true reach of criticism.

"Yes, I have read your filthy pages," snarls Vincent, going back down to the ice and shaking his gnarly fist at the critic. "I know you: 'Until one tries to write about it, the work remains a sort of aesthetic blur,' you wrote. Pah! Absurdities! Stuff and nonsense!—the man who would teach us how to see art, cannot see art. He can think about art, but cannot feel it. Art is not analysis. It is synthesis. Creativity! Yes, for us artists, a work of art is actually more powerful than its verbal retelling. Only for you, the all-too-many, the lastmen, *Les Nains*, is art indecipherable. You must make do with the pathetic agon between non-artist and non-artist, the cackling of critic to critic."

With that, Vincent stuffs his hat in his pocket and wanders off to find Friedrich in the Second Ring, leaving us to climb back to the surface unescorted. Through a fissure in the rock we squeeze into the present at Pietrasanta, and I mail this report at the first Italian postbox before getting back to work. And you? *Quo vadis?*

Arthur Danto

by Miles Mathis



Arthur Danto

**"He will be read when Homer and Virgil
are forgotten, but—*not till then.*" —Porson**

[Yes, as you can see from this picture, Danto is cross-eyed. Normally I wouldn't point something like this out, but I think that in this case it is a crucial fact for the reader to know. Given Danto's vast commentary, and the negative influence of that commentary upon art history, this feature is important, even telling, perhaps even fateful.]

Arthur Danto, now in his eighties, began writing for *The Nation* in 1984. At that time he already had a long career as a philosophy professor at Columbia University (where he still teaches). He had written

several books in the field of philosophy—including one on Nietzsche—but none of them had caused much of a ripple. Danto could have chalked this up to the fact that he was a mediocre writer and a mediocre thinker, but he possessed the one trait that, in the modern world, could both transcend these limitations and save him from self-evaluation: he had ambition. Why this ambition should not have hit high gear until his 60's is not part of my counter-critique—perhaps it was residue from a mid-life crisis. It does not matter. In the 1980's Danto discovered he wanted to be famous, and said so in writing.

I have not needed some Freudian analysis to penetrate Danto's intentions or ambitions. I have not needed to manufacture them to fit my attack. Danto has been good enough to spell them out himself. Like Gerhard Richter and John Currin, Danto has felt free to state his ambitions, his goals and desires, even when they might appear to be a bit shallow or vulgar. Danto and the modern artists have no fear of shallowness or vulgarity. If they had, they would surely have chosen other fields. Modern art was the perfect pool with the perfect depth. You could swim for decades without ever getting your hair wet.

Danto correctly judged that his chances for minor fame were greater in art criticism than in philosophy. No one wanted to read extended treatises on Nietzsche anymore (and if they did they were reading Walter Kaufmann or someone who had a clue, anyway). Art criticism, though, was a growing field. Especially in New York City, the arts were everywhere. All around him people with absolutely no talent for anything were getting to be minor celebrities. Everyone was toasting one another and underwriting one another and writing about one another in a million journals. Why not be a part of all that? For heaven's sake, he had a lot of connections. He had been in New York for 35 years. He knew publishers and artists and other writers. He had a resume padded with a lot of words. Besides, he was a polite old man who seemed a threat to no one. Nothing could be easier.

And here we are, 20 years later, and Danto is one of the first names in art criticism. He lectures, sits on panels, is invited everywhere. All this without ever saying anything memorable or important. In two decades of articles Danto has successfully avoided ever having a strong opinion. He would not want to be accused of intolerance, you see. Like everyone else, he has his likes and dislikes, but they seem about as warm as the Grinch's socks. This is how it must be. His fans do not want heated debates or warm opinions. They care as much about art as Danto does—meaning very very little. For them art criticism is a bland diversion, like a cup of sugared coffee or a vanilla ice cream cone. It is a gentle coddling. What they get from a Danto article is a low drone, like the TV left on at night. It is a soothing reminder that other people are living uneventful lives, saying harmless and meaningless things, and getting paid well for it. They have just come from those nasty political arguments in *The Nation*, where the writer, although reinforcing all their prejudices, still has the effrontery to imply that people on the other side exist, and disagree. But here, in learning about art from uncle Arthur, we find all that dissolves like mist. Here everyone is equal. Everyone is calm. Everyone is an artist.

In my article *Dante contra Danto*, I have already posted a few of the most damaging quotes from Danto's career, but I feel more quotification is in order, if only to give some immediate proof to all my assertions here. The following quotes are not especially memorable, even for their being extravagantly false. I choose them because they are both false and unmemorable, and therefore highly representative of Danto's *oeuvre*. In an article from *The Nation* [June 7, 1999], Danto says this:

According to tradition the visual and the picturable must be equivalent—a picture of an object should ideally yield the same experience as the object itself. For that reason, illusion played a central role in theories of visual art almost from the beginning. Modernism, for whatever reason, separated picturability and visuality, so that a picture need no longer look like what it was to represent.

No traditional artist that ever lived would agree that a picture of an object should yield the same experience as the object itself. That definition of art could not be more pointless. Even the still-life artists who meticulously copied arrangements would not say that experiencing the painted still life was equivalent to experiencing the objects in it. And besides, artists who have meticulously copied life have been a very small minority. Most have used life only as a starting point. Illusionism has never been the primary goal of any art, even the most life-like. That this is still misunderstood by educated people is astonishing, especially people supposedly educated in Deconstruction by the likes of Derrida and Foucault. Illusionism as the definition of traditional art is the most facile and reductive (and bourgeois) analysis possible. A modern lover of psychoanalysis should be able to find a million ways to tie the artistic impulse, in whatever age, to myriad forms of culture, socio-politics, and individual psychology. For a modern intellectual to claim that human beings in the past were painting just to make copies is to display the worst sort of double standard. Danto and contemporary critics spend thousands of pages minutely analyzing the psychological intentions and cultural implications of every last action of modern artists. But traditional artists are given a sound-byte analysis. Monkeys pushing buttons to get bananas benefit from more in-depth analysis.

Danto claims that illusionism played a central role in theories of art from the beginning. Maybe so. Maybe he has read ancient texts that have eluded my eyes. But even if this is true, it would only prove that art theorists were as clueless in the past as they are now. No matter what critics may have written, no artist has painted a picture primarily from an impulse to make a copy. This should be so self-evident to an enlightened people, I will not even stoop to expand on it here. Any small attempt at rigor or consistency would lead a thinking person into fields much richer than that of illusionism.

I suspect that what Danto really means by "from the beginning" is "from the beginning of Modern criticism." From the beginning, modern critics have facilely dismissed traditional art on the grounds of illusionism. According to the limits of my own reading, that noun "illusionism" was coined or perfected by Clement Greenberg. For Greenberg, pre-modern art could be dismissed out-of-hand as illusionist,

since illusionism was so obviously limited in its psychological complexity. More recent critics like Danto and Adam Gopnik have simply borrowed this slander from Greenberg. They did not feel it necessary to give him a footnote, since everyone knows that "from the beginning" traditional art was simplistic and moronic, just a parrot mindlessly repeating the forms of his master Nature.

Modern critics have found complexity in contemporary people and artifacts because they have sought it (or manufactured it). They have failed to find complexity in traditional art and artists because they have not sought it. The attitude of modern criticism to pre-modern art is analogous to an anthropologist who postulates that tribal people have sexual taboos because they are frigid and are trying to avoid it. Or a biologist who speculates that penguins became flightless because they ate too many fish and put on too much weight. Or an archaeologist who theorizes that the pyramids were built as garages for slightly smaller pyramids. The theory that traditional art is illusionist is precisely as profound (and true) as these theories.

So far I have only failed to comment on the last sentence in Danto's quote. Why did I include it? I included it to show you those limpid and precise words "picturability" and "visuality." Clearly we are in the presence of a master of the language, and all his theoretical and factual fuzziness must be forgiven in the light of this greater artistic good.

Let's find another quote to have fun with:

It [Modernism] was rather something that slowly dawned over the face of European art, possibly having to do with the growing awareness of different representational systems, coming from other cultures, which were free of the optical constraints of traditional Western painting.

This is another one of the false truisms of modern criticism. That is, it is universally accepted that the influx of art from other cultures led, at least in part, to Modernism. As stated by Danto, it is even more false, for he tells us *why* these non-European influences led to non-representation: they were free of traditional optical restraints. Unfortunately for his argument, they weren't. Not even the most primitive influences (from tribal Africa, say) were at all free of being representational. None were formalist, none were abstract, none were straight politics or propaganda. I defy anyone to show me a work of art from any culture in the world before 1900 that is primarily formalist, abstract or political. The influences from around the world were doubtless enriching to art and art history in many ways, but mainly because they *widened* the field of representation. They showed a greater variety of ways of joining a strictly physical experience to a broader psychological or cultural experience. If this were the claim of modernism, I would have no reason to counter it. But this is not the claim. The claim is that this early multiculturalism somehow led to where we are. It does not. The art of non-European cultures, where it was interesting to artists, was always interesting for its content, not its lack of content. Cezanne,

Picasso, Matisse and Gauguin, did not incorporate world art into their own creations in order to distill them or conventionalize them or minimize their impact. Just the opposite. World art was incorporated to revivify European art. But this revivification was short-lived. Modernism is not primarily concerned with or defined by this late 19th century and early 20th century multiculturalism. It is defined mainly by formalism, abstraction, and politics. These categories were not supplied by world art. They came from within the culture—from Western sociopolitics. They came from critics and other middlemen who wanted to coopt art for their own purposes.

A bit later in the article, Danto floats once again into that favorite haunt of the modern critic, the grotto of art and culture:

So it is a simple enough matter to distinguish Art from Culture. The paintings are paradigmatically Art. If audiovisual technologies are required to show something, it belongs, roughly, to Culture. So Tiffany lamps might be considered Art, since we can show examples and not just photographic reproductions of them. We can also show handsomely designed coffeepots and vacuum cleaners, as MoMA began to do decades ago. But most of Culture is displayable mainly through secondary means, like photographs of performances, posters, playbills and the like.

Another quote that does fine double duty, I must say. Look at that word "paradigmatically." I swoon at the loveliness of its use. Loveliness that is commensurate with the content of the paragraph as a whole. Anything we can show a sample of is art. If it requires a slide presentation, it is culture. Brilliant.

But the true beauty of the definition is how it is contradicted in the following paragraphs:

Once we reclassify Culture as Art, we are no longer obliged to ask what the relationship is between objects of Art and of Culture or what knowing about Culture helps to explain about Art. If Culture is already Art, then it no more provides a context within which Art is to be understood than painting provides a context within which vaudeville is to be understood.

Whew, that's good to know. So, despite its precision and usefulness, we don't have to be limited to the definition of culture as "things that require audiovisual technology." Culture is already art, which means that audiovisual technology is art, *and* the reverse:

There is another way to think of the matter. This is to treat art as culture. That means, of course, treating high as well as low art as indexes of and openings into the American mentalité at a given moment. Here are their songs, their dances; this is what they wore; these were the pictures they looked

at; this is how they lived. From this perspective, there is nothing to choose between paintings and MetroCards or \$5 bills or IRS 1040 forms or lottery tickets. These all help to open the American spirit up for cultural analysis.

Who would have thought that Danto could continue to crescendo after defining culture and art in terms of audiovisual technology? But yes, he did it. There is nothing to choose between lottery tickets and art. They may all be defined in terms of audiovisual technology, one supposes. Culture≡Art≡Audiovisual technology≡American spirit≡Cultural analysis.

Danto must find art criticism so comfortable. In such a situation one can say just about anything and readers will not complain. Everything equals everything else, all is undifferentiated, there is nothing to choose between one thing and another, no matter how diverse. The only problem is not getting lost in absolute non-distinction. In remembering that ultimately a pen is not a piece of paper, a computer screen is not a keyboard, and a noun is not a verb. Danto appears very close to achieving this final freedom, in fact. The sentences are precariously near to gibberish; a gentle shove and the whole lot will tilt into farcical art, like the writings of Dubuffet. Danto's prepositions will pose as gerunds, his participles will switch with his pronouns, and there will be nothing to choose between the letters of the alphabet.

DEFAMATION

by Miles Mathis

Why most people don't understand the legal definition of "defamation" anymore: they are misdirected by lobbyists, lawyers, and government stooges to believe in a new definition, a definition that will shut them up.

"An act of communication that causes someone to be shamed, ridiculed, held in contempt, lowered in the estimation of the community, or to lose employment status or earnings or otherwise suffer a damaged reputation. Such defamation is couched in 'defamatory language'."

That is the first paragraph of the legal definition of defamation in the US. Given that, many people can't understand why I have not been sued for defamation. After all, it appears to be my intent to ridicule my enemies and to damage their reputation. However, these people are ignoring the last sentence. Ridiculing people is not against the law, and neither is damaging their reputation. Both are against the law or actionable *only* when they are done with defamatory language. What is defamatory language? In short, it is telling lies. Therefore, defamation is not ridiculing someone or damaging their reputation. Defamation is telling lies about someone *in order* to ridicule them or damage their reputation.

Many people don't understand that, which is why we have so many frivolous lawsuits filed. They don't bother to read past the opening sentences, so they don't have any idea what defamation really is. They think that if they have been shamed in any way, they have an actionable offense. But of course they don't, because they may have set themselves up for shame. Just as you can't sue the police for ruining your reputation by arresting you for a crime you committed, you can't sue a writer for saying you are a creep, when you are in fact a creep.

Not only is truth a defense in a defamation lawsuit, opinion is also. You are allowed to think that other people are phonies, that they are wrong, and that they are jerks, and to say so. If you weren't, then every political candidate would sue his or her opponent in every election. Everyone interviewed by Bill O'Reilly would sue him. Everyone on the short end of a bad review would sue the critic, and criticism would be over.

Some think that once a critic starts giving reasons for his opinion, the opinion has turned into a statement of fact, but that isn't true either. Courts have always let the public weigh these reasons, except when the reasons are obviously and demonstrably false. A critic would have to be saying things that he and everyone else knows are false, and doing it with pretty clear malice, in order to be guilty of defamation. In the US, defamation is very hard to prove, which is why the gossip rags can say all the things they do. It is why O'Reilly can say all the things he does. O'Reilly is probably telling lies on purpose, with malice, and yet that would be very difficult to prove. To prove his statements were false,

you would bring in your experts and he would bring in his. The judge would then dismiss the whole thing as politics, saying it is up to the viewer to decide.

Another reason there aren't more defamation lawsuits is that those claiming to be defamed are put in the position of proving the statements aren't true. And the defendant is given the opportunity in court to prove they are true. If you are suing someone for defamation, the last thing you want to do is give them a public, highly publicized forum for proving that you do indeed deserve to be ridiculed, shamed, or to lose your job. Bill O'Reilly showed that when he sued Al Franken for defamation. All he did is give Franken an opportunity to prove in court that O'Reilly was indeed a liar. Remember that Rush Limbaugh did not sue Franken when Franken titled his book, "Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot." Why didn't he? Because Rush IS demonstrably big and fat, and because "idiot" is an opinion.

Opinion and criticism *is* being squelched by the threat of lawsuits, but this is the fault of the critic as much as the litigator. Many people are allowing themselves to be silenced, through sheer cowardice. All they need to say is what Franken said: "Please sue me! I need the publicity!" Franken knew that his books were protected in about ten different ways. One, they were true. Two, they were opinion. Three, they were satire. Etc.

Sadly, the legal requirements for defamation in Europe are much lower than in the US. About all you have to do is prove you lost some sleep, and they fine the other guy a year's salary. But of course this is as much the fault of the critics and writers over there as it is the fault of the litigators or attorneys or the government. Why? Because the government is answerable to the people in Europe just as much as it is here. If writers are being repressed, it is because they are allowing themselves to be repressed. I lived in Europe for several years and was not impressed by the courage of anyone there. Most people I talked to didn't see any need for freedom of speech or of the press, and they actually ridiculed us Americans for talking about it so much. I talked to many people about the David Irving case and I couldn't get anyone to defend him on principle. I honestly couldn't believe it. Maybe the current crisis over there will cause a change of course. Maybe the Europeans will finally realize that they need stronger Constitutional protections of speech and press, and quit fining the various Brigitte Bardots for having an opinion.

Of course the Europeans are not the only ones in danger. We are sliding that direction in a thousand ways, and as it happens we are also backsliding on this question of defamation. Although the Franken case was recent and was decided quickly and correctly, we also have a lot of writers caving in to slap suits. Not only that, but we have a lot of bullshit legislation like cyberbullying, hate speech, and so on. We are only a small step away from criminalizing dissent. We have "free speech zones" outside of political events (which turn out to be actual cages) when legally the whole country is a free speech zone. We have the Anti-Defamation League redefining defamation as anything that conflicts with their desired policies. And we have the CIA and Pentagon censoring newspapers and books, redacting unclassified information, which is illegal. No government agency is allowed to do that, according to the Constitution, and the only reason they get away with it is that we allow them to. We put up with it and we elect people who put up with it. It is not that we are much more courageous than Europeans, it is that

we are still mostly protected by the courage of our ancestors, who had the foresight to draw up a pretty strict Constitution. In my opinion, the Constitution could be much longer and clearer, forbidding many more things to the government, with stated penalties, but it would be a good first step to protect what we have. As it is, we are losing it quickly, and may soon face fines or jail time for disagreeing with the government, our bosses, or our opponents. Writers all over the world must stand up for their right to speak their minds. And those who aren't writers had better join them.

But why do so many people misunderstand defamation? Is it only because they don't read closely enough? No, it is because they often or always read propaganda, and this propaganda is written by lobbyists, attorneys, or paid government spinners, all of whom would prefer they learn to accept a new definition of defamation. Although the legal definition hasn't changed, these people want you to think it has, so that you will shut up and do what you are told. They want you to be scared of a lawsuit every time you have an opinion. They don't want you to talk, to blog, to write papers, or to write letters to the editor. They want you to second guess yourself at every moment, so that you end up doing nothing. If they can shut you up, the only ones talking will be them: those paid by the powers that be to keep the power and the money where it is. So they convince you that defamation is now just the act of ruining someone's reputation. Yes, that illustration at the top of this page was drawn up by some think tank or agency, expressly to lower the threshold of defamation, and to scare or otherwise push you into keeping silent. Don't do it. Don't be silent. Even if I disagree with you, I don't want you to be silent. Primarily, I want you to tell the government, the lobbyists and the lawyers to shove their new manufactured and false definition of defamation, in the loudest possible voice. The old definition was fine.

A Reply to Maureen Dowd

by Miles Mathis



Having just read Maureen Dowd's article in the *New York Times* ["What's a Modern Girl to do?"] I have an immediate answer for her. The thing to do, Modern Girls, is don't title your upcoming books *Are Men Necessary: When Sexes Collide*, and things like that.

In her very long article Dowd gives us a hatful of excuses for why she and her smart and successful girlfriends are still single, but none of them are near the mark. The number one reason they are single is that they title their books *Are Men Necessary? etc.* They are single because they are not nice people. It is that simple.

The Modern Girl is mean, and she reveals this meanness in everything she says and does, in every choice she makes, in every look she owns. I will address the numerous cracks in the Modern-Girl veneer in the same order that Dowd reveals them in the article.

On page 1, Dowd tells us that men like shiny things, like lots of hair on the head, and don't like sarcasm. Well, in general, men do like lots of hair on the head, as do women. Women seem to prefer full hair, where men are more likely to be fascinated by length, but both sexes like hair. Hair is pretty and soft and nice to touch, and it is generally a plus. No one should find this odd, though women have a way of twisting anything to make men look shallow. Dowd might as well blame men for liking chocolate ice cream or puppies. As far as the other two items, however, Dowd is wrong. The kind of

men that would be interested in women like her do not like shiny things on a woman. The kind of men that like shiny things on women are the kind of men that like Pam Anderson. These men are not the ones that would naturally be attracted to the brainy type. The kind of man who yearns for a tall sophisticated Irish lass, a Modern Maud Gonne, is not going to be impressed by cheap baubles. He is also not going to like a bunch of make-up and fakery, be it fake breasts or dye-jobs. So the ex-beaus she has fought with to keep her make-up and such were right and she is wrong. She is going against type and against nature to spoil her raw beauty with a bunch of products, and if she hasn't figured that out after 50 years, maybe she deserves to be single. She would have been smarter to take it all as the ultimate compliment, which any fool can see that it is, but if she prefers to flaunt her independence by flying in the face of all reason, that is certainly her choice to make. It is no man's fault, however.

Likewise concerning sarcasm. Smart men like a bit of sarcasm, as long as it is not directed at them. This is the line that the Modern Girl seems to be unable to draw. Men have been free to joke since the dawn of time, so maybe they have a better feel for these things. They know that they may be free to do anything, but if they want a person to like them, they should avoid certain freedoms, one of which is insulting that person. Men's jokes are therefore created to be at anyone's expense other than the lover. In my experience, clever women can't be bothered to respect this line. Being clever is equivalent for them to being independent, so that being clever without insulting a man present is almost beside the point. Once again, this is no mark against the man. It does not require an "eggshell ego" to take offense when it is clearly intended. It would require a head of wood, which is not presumably the sort of head these smart women are seeking (no matter how full the hair is on it).

Dowd's next stunning error is conflating flirting with playing hard to get. I agree with her that women need to relearn the art of flirting, which in my mind is just the art of being nice. But this is not in any way equivalent to playing hard to get. Women, though, cannot give up the idea of love as a game, and when they see that one trick is not working they must take up another. If abuse is (surprise) not working, they think that indifference will. I have a suggestion: try just being nice. If "be yourself" has no meaning, then make a game of it by trying to be some imaginary person who is nice. This imaginary person can be as smart as she likes; she can have useful information on every topic and a talent for every field; but she must be agreeable while telling her stories or performing her tricks. If that still does not help, think of it this way: a smart woman does not have to criticize her date, assume he is "just like all the rest", make him jump through hoops, snap-judge him on his shoes, or judge him on a thousand other pre-set standards, most of which are arbitrary and meaningless. She does not have to talk about money, she does not have to talk about other men, she does not have to give out little cries for psychoanalysis, she does not have to talk about *Sex and the City* or *Cosmo*, she does not have to infer over and over that all the problems with the world are due to men and that women are superior in every way.

Dowd's next mistake is assigning love of the chase to men. I have news for her—men do not like the chase. Think of the chase like shopping. Men do not like shopping. They like to run into the mall once a year, buy the first things they see, and get the hell out. It is women that like shopping and that like the chase. And why not? They are the ones being chased. It makes them feel important to be made a fuss over.

Now, it is true, some men like making a fuss over a woman, but this is not the same as the chase. You get to make a fuss over a woman only after it is clear that the attraction goes both ways. The fuss I am talking about is pampering, not dating. Trying to schedule a date or buying gifts alone or outgunning other boyfriends or listening to first-date talk is not fun. It is a chore on the level of doing the dishes or going to the dentist. Guys put up with it only to get past it as fast as possible. Women will say the same thing applies to what I have called pampering. It lasts a couple of weeks at most, and is usually defined mostly by sex. I fear that for many men this is a chore founded on fact. But for other men, it is not true. Going shopping with a woman, for instance, is only a chore if you are there for your money. If you get to choose some of the things that are bought, and it is all done with grace, then there is nothing better. It becomes a part of pampering, like backrubs and baths and so on.

All this is to say that men do not love the chase, but they are wary of sex that is too easy. In this, they aren't any different from women. If you are being made to wait as a test or because the woman is confused, then that can be annoying. On the other hand, if you hop in the bed on the first date, then that can be scary. How many other men has she hopped into bed with on the first date? Commonsense. Not "the way men think" but the way thinking people think. Smart, nice people wait until they know each other before they have sex, since people who have sex with strangers are sluts. No one not pathologically in love with danger wants to have a relationship with a slut, of either sex.

What this means is that almost all dating rules are useless except this one: give the guy the benefit of the doubt. Don't throw him into some hole and make him dig himself out. Let him make his own mistakes. Make some attempt to put a good spin on whatever happens, unless it is clearly beyond the pale. If he doesn't offer to pay, maybe it is because he doesn't want to offend you, since you are so important and independent and all-powerful. Seeing that the rules change every week, maybe he is carrying a slightly outdated feminist manifesto. If you are going to judge him by rules, at least give him a copy beforehand. Otherwise it is just a cruel set-up.

This last point brings me to where the Modern Girl has lost it completely. Where she has thought herself out of a man. On the one hand she does not want a milquetoast—she wants a man who is sexually exciting. True, we see a lot of confused Modern Girls with milquetoasts—the guys walking six steps behind and staying very quiet. But Modern Girls like Maureen Dowd are at least honest enough, or have enough self-respect, to aim higher, even if it means being alone. She does not want a milquetoast. But she also will not forgive a man for telling her the truth. That truth is that all the various manifestoes and rulebooks are absurd, and what is more, offensive. If she does not have to live by my rules, I sure as hell don't have to live by hers.

The Modern Girl can dish it out but she cannot take it. She wants to argue but she cannot stand losing. She wants the luxury of being the pre-defined winner. If the Modern Girl will write you off for a mistake in paying the bill or a mistake over some political allegiance, you can imagine your chances if you stand up for yourself on the central issue. If you demand that you are still as equal as she is, come what may, the sky falls and the worldwide warning to all girls is sent out over the airwaves. You will be lucky to ever have a date again.

This is an inconvenience to the man, but it puts the Modern Girl in a pickle too. She has ostracized all real men by pre-categorizing them. If they disagree with her in any substantive way, they are far right cranks, even if they voted for Nader or go to Chomsky lectures. So she gets her pick of the milquetoasts, has to fight her friends for the best of the milquetoasts, and ends up complaining about the milquetoasts in high-profile print. Her analogue in the UK, Fay Weldon, has asked why “All Englishmen are Women.” They aren’t of course, not even the most liberal of them. But the ones who don’t run screaming from the presence of Dowd or Weldon are only the milquetoasts. The men worth dating have long since been driven off by the titles of their books and articles, or before that by the subject matter of all their offensive conversations.

Dowd proves this once again with her claim that “the key to staying cool in the courtship rituals is B&I, girls say—Busy and Important.” I have only one question in response, “Do you, Modern Girl, like it when a man is Busy and Important?” Maybe in the abstract, since it is a sign of power. But not day-to-day. If a man treats you as if he is busy and important, it is just T&A—Terribly Annoying. Well, the same thing works in reverse. If a woman is too busy and important to return my calls, then she can date a lesser man. Even the gods must treat each other with courtesy and good manners. If they are interested, they must act interested. If they don’t, they are just phonies—fake gods in plated sandals.

But the Modern Girl has no manners. She may be well educated but she is ill-bred. She doesn’t have to be thoughtful or polite, or even adhere to the basic rules of dating like calling you if she has to break an appointment. She has been so spoiled by her beauty and intelligence, and by the interest of so many men in her late teens and twenties, that by the time she is thirty she is intolerable. Dating a successful Modern Girl over thirty is like dating a snake or a dragon.

The fundamental problem is that no matter what this week’s manifesto happens to be, women are getting all their information from other women. Every month is a different diagnosis, but no one ever seems to arrive at the idea of asking the patient how he feels. Or, to put it in even more provocative terms, what we have is the client arriving at the brothel and being told by a long line of ever-changing madams what sort of girl he needs or desires. These days even the most bottom-line madam never thinks to ask the John.

The Modern Girl is a pragmatist about most things, but she will take anyone’s advice before she will ask a man. Take clothes, for instance. She will wear the sluttiest thing imaginable if some guru at some magazine assures it will turn on the guys. Anonymous designers, unknown labels, meretricious advertisers, gay men who look down their noses at the preferences of straights, all are consulted and admired. The Modern Girl would sooner consult the starcharts or the entrails of geese than ask her lover what he would like to see her in. If he said a flower dress and sandals she would have to kill him.

We have reached the point now, after years of dealing with such aggressive madams, that the John is so confused he no longer can speak his own mind. He goes to the room he is assigned and tries to put a good face on it. And women wonder why viagra is necessary for these men.

Dowd is interviewing all the wrong people. She isn’t really “interviewing” anyone of course; she is just collecting scattershot data that seems at first glance to support her prejudice. Look at whom Dowd

quotes about “what men want?” Helen Fisher, a Rutgers anthropologist, for one, among a slate of other professional (and one supposes, single) women. The Modern Girl appears incapable of doing her research. Any truly practical woman, or good reporter, would just ask the man she was with what he wanted, and then do it. Or not do it. But then at least she would know. She could then write an article as an enlightened secondhand source. She could never be a primary source, like I am, but at least she would not have to appear in public as a mystic, basing all her statements on hearsay (a typo, but I like it) and gossip.

Dowd, after telling us outright that she doesn’t get dates because she is too successful, then gives us this insightful gem, “It took women a few decades to realize that everything they were doing to advance themselves in the boardroom could be sabotaging their chances in the bedroom.” No Maureen, only the mean stuff is sabotaging your chances in the bedroom. The self-centered stuff like reminding us how successful you are, the aggressively offensive stuff like titling books “Are Men Necessary...?” The photographs of you looking mean and scary, sitting there smugly daring someone to make a peep. You don’t look like a whole lot of fun.

And you don’t seem to have any excuse for it. If I were posing for a photo to accompany a similar article, I would have to pose in a tiger’s costume to keep from being eaten alive. If I had written a book called “Are Women Necessary?” I would need considerably more life insurance (of course I would never have been published in the first place, or landed a position at the *Times*). But you have a free pass. No one is attacking you for being a woman. Just the opposite. Only someone who had been given the ultimate benefit of the doubt could publish such a book or such an article. In your position I would be defending myself, as I am in this letter. But not you. You are firing the first shot. You are attacking all men, as men. If you are looking tigerish, it is only because you are fascinated by the pose.

Here’s another funny one. Dowd tells us this story: “A few years ago at a White House correspondents’ dinner, I met a very beautiful and successful actress. Within minutes, she blurted out: ‘I can’t believe I’m 46 and not married. Men only want to marry their personal assistants or P.R. women.’” Again, Dowd reminds us she is at the White House—charming that. But she apparently does not consider the possibility that the actress is single because she is pathetic. The sort of person who blurts out at a public gathering, to someone she has just met, something so gloriously and transparently neurotic is just the sort of person you’d expect to be single. In fact, she is just the sort of person you would expect to be a successful actress, and just the sort of person you’d expect to soon be at Betty Ford. Of course Dowd ignores all of this. If men want to marry young pretty idiots instead of aging pretty idiots, she needs to pretend to find this odd.

Here is the next thing we are supposed to hold against men: “Men think that women with important jobs are more likely to cheat on them.” Yes, so? These men are right. Just as women think that men with important jobs are more likely to cheat on them, and are correct in thinking it. You can hardly blame men (or women) for being right about a statistic. Not all powerful men or women cheat, but they do have more opportunities. This is no reason to draw a negative conclusion about the men and a positive one about the women. Women date and marry the powerful men anyway, Dowd tells us, expecting us to envy and hate the powerful men and feel sorry for the women, I guess, since they get

cheated on. But I could easily turn the tables and say that this is a sign of the stupidity or shallowness of the women who do it, since they either ignore the obvious facts or they just want the money. If men do not as often date the powerful women, maybe it is not because they are emasculated by the idea. Maybe it is because they are not so gullible or not so transparently avaricious.

Dowd claims that “men marrying down” causes the glut of unmarried professional women. But could it be that these women are unmarried because they have never said yes to a proposal? Could it be that they have insulted and scorned and ignored any man that might have had the potential of asking? Could it be that they have pasted too many bumper stickers like this on their cars over the years: “a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.”

That is the Modern Girl sense of humor in a nutshell right there. Men like whimsy and nonsense and at worst, fart jokes. See Dave Barry for contemporary male humor in most of its phases. But women like crushing cruelty, very broadly aimed. And they apparently like it best when it is as false as possible. For they think that while we are transparent to them, they are completely opaque to us. They therefore are not embarrassed to continue to quote such “jokes” and to stand around and snigger about them. They imagine they have earned the right to be so crass, insensitive, and deluded. Maybe they have. They have also earned the right to be single. They should enjoy it with a bit more zest.

The exact same point can be made about Dowd’s mention of Harvard Business School as the kiss of death for female graduates and a big sexual calling card for male graduates. Again, I would think this to be a strong signal about both the men and women involved, but Dowd prefers to blame the men and pity the women. Dowd seems to be criticizing men for not being goldiggers in the same numbers as women. She doesn’t appear to find the young women chasing male HBS graduates around to be sleazy, or appear to find it at all shallow that the female graduates expect their degree to buy them dates. She is only concerned that it isn’t.

And then there is all the talk of *Cosmo*. Men don’t read, edit, or care anything about such magazines. If women do, I think they should take credit for the content. But that is entirely too logical for the Modern Girl. Despite the loose talk of freedom and independence, it is apparently believed that all the actions of women are scripted and corrupted by little invisible men. If women are returning to a Stepford Wife conformity, it can have nothing to do with their choices. If they haven’t figured out how to be successful and nice at the same time, it is not their fault. If men don’t want to marry aging mean scary ladies, then something must be wrong with the universe. Women should have been free to get as unappealing as possible and still have sex, dates and marriage on demand. After all, men seem to get this. How do men get this? They buy sex, dates, and marriage from really stupid greedy women. Nothing is stopping you from that, Maureen. Plenty of men who fit that description, especially in New York City.

After all this, what is perhaps most shocking and disturbing is to see a supposedly upper-class Modern Girl like Maureen Dowd quoting all these trashy sources. Why do we have to hear about Jessica Simpson and Pam Anderson and *Sex and the City* and *Maxim* and *Cosmo*? It is almost as bad as having to hear Camille Paglia talk about Madonna. You can’t even find a humanities major at Vassar or Princeton or

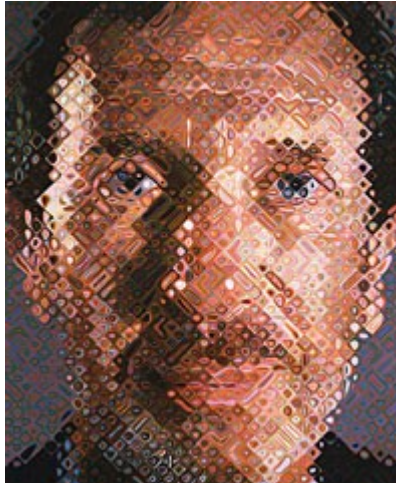
Amherst who will quote Jane Austen or Sappho to you anymore. The Modern Girl, at all levels, is almost completely without charm, which is precisely why Bill Maher is asking her to shut up. She strives to look and act like the gum-smacking graduate of Topeka Beauty College. Even Gwyneth Paltrow only looks good in *Emma*; the rest of the time she is in costume from the *Royal Tennenbaums*, smoking herself hoarse and otherwise ruining her great beauty by fast degrees. It is the same everywhere: the fashions are awful, the hairstyles worse, the conversation garish and loud and uninformed. Men did not ask for it to be this way. Women are impressing only other women, we suppose, and we cannot fathom it.

Strangely, through all this, it is I who am the more hopeful for the future of feminism. Dowd sees only another round of backsliding. But I believe that present failures are only personal failures. Not all smart women are "Modern Girls", for one thing. If Modern Girls of the type I have critiqued above haven't found a way to be successful and tolerable, it is not because it is genetically or socially impossible. It is only because the leading feminists have so far made bad choices and correctable errors. They have fragged their allies and shot themselves in the foot over and over. They have misdefined a limited political battle for an all-out war of the sexes—a war that cannot be won by either side. They have adopted many of the worst traits of their opponents and have lost sight of the true masculine virtues. Rather than change the face of corrupt politics or big business, they have only corrupted themselves and made both fields bigger. Sex, policed now by women, is a grimmer place than it was fifty years ago, and it was no picnic fifty years ago. We have graduated from an aging Puritanism to a glittering neuroticism, trading one sordid concept for another. Women have been pretty much free to re-invent a lost naturalism in sex or a happy home and office, and this is all they have come up with. An exponential increase in insensitivity, predatory action, false body images, and selfishness. The sins of men have not been mitigated, they have been augmented. We now have two sexes adept at being mean and selfish, and who take great pride in it. Our politics has weaned the last residue of kindness and innocence from us. If we could only make our children equally intolerable, all charm would have fled the world. Wait, we already did that. How about puppies?

Things are very very bad. Dowd is right in one respect: when one of the sexes is a Modern Girl, the sexes no longer meet, they collide. But men do not want it this way. We do not want to fight, we do not want to chase rude and thoughtless women, we do not want to have to defend ourselves at all hours or lay down and take the constant abuse. We want long soft hair and backrubs and chocolate ice cream and puppies and well-mannered children and flower gardens—all the things you used to want. We do not want to go back to the past to get them. We do not want all the responsibility or all the credit, all the votes or all upper-level jobs. But even the most liberal of us want to go back or go forward—to do *something else* than what we are doing now. The tiger outfits are hot and stifling. They take it out of you after a while.

A Review of Tim Eitel *and Pace Wildenstein Gallery*

by Miles Mathis



Arne Glimcher
Pace Wildenstein owner
by Chuck Close

Let us start with the images. They should be primary, after all.





Next we will look at the publicity: “In Tim Eitel's emotionally complex and stirring paintings, the artist conflates fragments of images and memories of everyday life with print and film media, as well as the history of art. Using formal, realist painting techniques, Eitel creates disconnected worlds extracted from time. The artist isolates his anonymous subjects from their contexts, profoundly elevating the significance of every gesture and nuance. Past and present, memories, feelings, and associations converge, evoking ambiguous narratives which force viewers to reexamine their own perceptions of society and to see that which they often allow to become invisible.

Eitel has participated in more than fifty exhibitions worldwide since 2000. He has received a number of prestigious scholarships and awards throughout his career, including the Marion Ermer-Preis (2003) and the Landesgraduiertenstipendium, Saxonia, Germany (2002). He was granted an artist's residency in the International studio programme at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin in 2002. His work is part of numerous museum collections and important private collections worldwide.”

Do the images match the publicity? Not at all. I don't know about you, but I don't see anything “emotionally complex” or “stirring.” In fact, the paintings have been emptied of all emotion, I would assume purposefully. That is what makes them modern and allows moderns to look at them. If they had any real emotion in them, they wouldn't be modern and wouldn't be allowed into contemporary galleries. If they were emotional in any way, they would be dismissed as kitsch. They wouldn't be “contemporary realist” they would be “passé realist.”

Next we are told that Eitel conflates fragments of images and memories of everyday life with print and film media. No, he doesn't. As we can see from these images, what he does is paint from photos he takes. He takes a common photo of some everyday scene—one that is not even interesting—and then subtracts out the background, painting it in some shade of gray. I don't see anything that looks like it was painted from memory, or that looks like a memory, or that feels like a memory. Beyond that, we may ask what conflation is taking place here. A conflation would be a simultaneous use of painted images with printed images and/or filmed images. We don't have that here. We have images painted from photos, which is not a conflation, it is simply a use of a tool. These promoters don't even know what words mean. They not only know nothing about art, they know nothing about using the English language, beyond using it as a garbled tool of money-making.

Next we learn that Eitel “uses formal, realist painting techniques.” Does he? Not really. He probably uses modern shortcuts like painting from projection, which is likely why his images are poorly painted, flat, and look somewhat like a blurry photo. You can call that a realist painting technique, at a stretch, but it is nothing like the traditional techniques used by the old masters up until the end of the 19th century. Eitel's promoters want you to think he is a great talent, but he isn't. Thousands of high-school kids can paint this well, or better.

Just look at this picture of the artist in his studio:



That's pathetic. In another pic—which I couldn't figure out how to borrow off the web—we see Eitel's method. He has a bunch of small photos taped to the wall. Nothing wrong with that, except that we real realists are crucified for using photos as reference. But the avant garde realists who benefit from *Pace Wildenstein* levels of promotion are praised to the skies for it. Using photos becomes a "conflation of memories, images, etc. with print and film media." Eitel is brilliant for using photos as reference, while I am just a cheater. But the bigger problem here is the starkness of Eitel's studio. Like Gerhard Richter's studio, it looks more like an OfficeMax being gutted and rewired than the studio of a creative person. We start with a large white cubicle, empty as the south pole. Then we add a cheap metal table, a laptop computer, a couple of back-issues of ARTnews, and some runny paints in dixie cups. Then we have some hardware-store disposable brushes, and one or two very large canvases, probably acrylic primed and slightly warped. So what, you say. The so what is that an artist's studio is a reflection of his mind, the embodiment of his creativity. A real artist's studio should be crammed full of interesting things to paint. It should be a beautiful room full of beautiful objects. It should also be a place for top-quality tools, hand-picked and cared for lovingly, molded by the touch of a master and patined by long use. Here are a couple of very different examples:



But the studios of these contemporary realists are antiseptic. You end up looking for the guy in a straightjacket who shares the space. Just off-camera he is squatting in the corner, swaying slightly.

This is just one more very obvious clue that these guys aren't real artists. They are computer technicians or bankers or stockbrokers that have been kidnapped, drugged, and photographed in somebody's insane idea of a studio. The CIA has erased all their memories and implanted the suggestion that they were artists. That implanted suggestion is all that remains in the conscious mind, which is why the studio looks like it has also been erased from the living world. Both "the artist" and his "studio" are just clipped and pixellated memory residues of a former time, buzzing eerily in a vast empty space. The white studio is a mirror of the white mind.

To continue this unintended theme of erasure and paucity and mental vacancy, we are told that Eitel creates "disconnected worlds extracted from time." Does that have any precise meaning? Any snapshot at Disneyland or Walmart could be said to be "extracted from time." Any two photos pulled out of the garbage at Walgreen's could be said to be of "disconnected worlds." Are we supposed to be impressed by "disconnected worlds extracted from time"? Shouldn't an artist be creating connections, not disconnections? We can find disconnected worlds just flipping through cable channels; why pay big money for it at *Pace Wildenstein*? Once again, it is mental patients who are supposed to be in "disconnected worlds extracted from time," not artists and their clients.

Then we are told that painting the background gray is done to "isolate his anonymous subjects from their contexts, profoundly elevating the significance of every gesture and nuance." Good god, this writer should be writing political speeches. That deserves to be read from a Teleprompter. But it should lead us to a long line of questions: 1) Why would an artist want to paint anonymous subjects? Anonymity is impersonal and therefore unemotional. Can anyone be "stirred" by anonymous subjects in no context? 2) How does this isolating from context "elevate the significance of every gesture"? Wouldn't it logically do the opposite? Context is that thing that provides significance, so that we can read the meaning of the gestures. Anonymous figures out of context can only be insignificant, by definition. 3) Might the backgrounds be painted gray because it is easier to paint gray backgrounds? Setting figures naturally into backgrounds is damned difficult, and maybe Eitel just isn't up to it. That is what we would assume at a high school art show. Why do we assume differently here, just because Arne Glimcher or one of his hacks is supplying the text?

We are then told that all these fake confections and convergences work by "evoking ambiguous narratives which force viewers to reexamine their own perceptions of society and to see that which they often allow to become invisible." If those images above force you to re-examine anything, it should be your art gullibility. If they evoke in you "ambiguous narratives" and so on, you might seriously consider investing in a comprehensive psychiatric insurance policy. You might ask yourself how you got to this point, where you could read sentences like that and look at images like that, finding them intelligible or interesting.

All this leads us to ask the final question: if Eitel has been given all these awards, exhibitions, residencies, and so on, almost all of them before he reached 35, how did he do it? He joined *Pace Wildenstein* in 2006, when he was 35. *PW* is about as high as you can go, promotion-wise. Why did *PW* take him on? I will tell you. Everything except figuration had bottomed out by 2005, since the art world had been recycling all the various minimalisms and conceptualisms since 1906. The only thing not done to death was realism. Realism had been squirming in a shallow grave for about nine decades, and it was time to disinter the poor wretch and reinstall the zombie in the upperclass gallery. By 2006, artists like John Currin and Jenny Saville had already made big waves. Even Damien Hirst was doing realism (or paying others to do it for him). Plus, you have to remember that *PW* had been representing Alex Katz and David Hockney all along, so they knew the precise value of bad realism. Bad realism can be sold as modern, since all the faults can be re-interpreted as ambiguities. Good realism is just

passé. It is passé because good realists endanger the entire market for art. Good realists, if seen for what they are—good—just make everyone else look bad and phony, so they have to be kept out.

In the second half of the past decade the top contemporary galleries have been sidling nearer and nearer to the top realist galleries, while keeping their prices way above them. *Pace Wildenstein* and *Gagosian* and so on look more and more like *John Pence* every year, and the reverse is also true. They have met in the middle, one might say, providing the client with neither real painting nor real politics. Instead, we have gotten a glut of paintings like those of Eitel: a faux realism, painted poorly and quickly from projection, that is both emotionless and talentless. The artist can't come up with a truly interesting subject, so he just paints from snapshots taken at random around the city. The gallery then props up these “paintings” with extended nonsense like we have pulled apart above, trying to create a relevance that is nowhere to be found in the actual images. Gerhard Richter pointed the way for Eitel, but Eitel has found a way to produce his own peculiar and awful nullities.

The convergence of realist gallery and contemporary gallery is precisely why galleries like *Forum* have struggled recently. It has been blamed on the economy, and that is part of it, but it is also because the realist galleries in that genre (so-called contemporary realism) now have to compete with *Pace Wildenstein* and *Gagosian* and the other very rich galleries that used to be avant garde. *John Pence Gallery* is no longer competing just with other realist galleries, it is competing directly with Damien Hirst's pimps and Eitel and Richter and Currin and so on. If it weren't for the fact that the modern gallery clients like to be seen spending enormous sums, Pence would probably already be defunct. Pence's saving grace is that he isn't in the same price range as *PW*. People who shop at *PW* aren't looking for bargains, but anti-bargains. They really don't want the same product at 1/10th the price. They want to pay a million dollars or more for their non-art.

So the answer is that Eitel made it for the same reason Katz and Pearlstein and Richter and Currin and the others made it: he was painting the right kind of realism at the right time. We may also assume he had connections. There are no good reasons for him to be famous, so I assume there are bad reasons.

To give that opinion of mine a bit more ballast, we will return to the paintings. I have torn apart the blurbs, and the images are even easier to dismiss. In the first, we find an empty bed. Not even a bed filled with syringes and vomit, as with Tracey Emin. Just a bed. Nor is it painted with some sort of anal “virtuosity”, as with Claudio Bravo. As I said before, it seems to have been stripped of all interest, including an interest in paint quality, paint handling, light effects, or composition. Someone really must write me, pointing out to me the stirring emotions I am missing there, the significant nuances, the ambiguous narratives. I can find no possible reason Eitel chose to paint that instead of anything else.

In the next image, we have a group of schoolchildren at the museum, doing absolutely nothing. They are not looking at works of art, unless the bright gap in the wall is intended as another ambiguous narrative, a work of art within a work of art. They are not talking to each other. One girl appears to be texting. Possibly she is saying, “Get me out of this boring painting!” Only three of twelve faces can be

seen, and those three are in profile, with eyes closed. The modern viewer will be able to read all sorts of supertexts and hypertexts over that, but to me it just means Eitel doesn't like to paint faces. They are too hard. Especially eyes. That just slows him down.

Then we have some guy digging a hole in the street. I assume it is the street, although the painting is so bad we aren't sure where he is. He may be on the Martian tarmac. Is his foot floating or on the ground? We aren't sure. By failing to paint the foot right, Eitel must be denying us context, so that we have to supply our own narrative. But if that is the case, I would have preferred he denied me all context, and all paint. I could then paint something interesting in my mind. Also, I must point out that Eitel has again given us a figure without a face. We are being fooled into thinking he can paint figures.

In the last painting, we have a pile of garbage, but it isn't even an interesting pile of garbage. This may be the remnants of Eitel's studio, which he has just very tidily and anally ejected from his house. We see the bed from image 1, which he no longer needs now that he has painted it: it wasn't even his—it was an anonymous bed, bought new from Target and then pitched before it could enjoy a slobber stain or a good boink. Then we see what may be parts of a cheap easel and a cheap portfolio. The white thing is unidentifiable. Is it a dead afghan hound? A pile of undyed muppet fur? An albino tribble? Everything else Eitel has conveniently hidden in Hefty, to avoid having to actually paint it.

Eitel doesn't waste much money on paint, does he? Not only are these painted very thin, we have almost no color. He only has to buy black and white.



But enough of the paintings. They aren't the product anyway. The paintings are just wallpaper at the

opening, where the product is Eitel getting his picture taken with Michael Ovitz or Martin Scorsese or somebody. Above we see him from the New York Social Diary, with Sophie Vigourous. If Glimcher can convince Ovitz or Geffen or some other Hollywood moron to put Eitel on the wall, everyone else in the social registers will want one, and the deal is done for several years. Look at Hockney, another of PW's "artists". Hockney has never produced a real painting in his life, by the old standards, but he got in sweet with the Hollywood people early on, in some way we probably don't want pictures of, and he is still a staple of these parties and articles, written by the shallow and the clueless.

As with all other pursuits previously called intellectual, such as poetry, criticism, literature, and music, art is now a wholly fake field inhabited by human husks. The only nice thing I can think to say is that if the US ever has to purge its intellectuals, we will lose only about five people. It won't be much of a bloodbath.

Yes, the art of the worldwide rich is all a plastic world within a plastic world, a cosmos in a Hefty bag. A black hole enwrapping a void surrounded by a screaming waste. I have seen these people's houses, in *Architectural Digest* or something, and I would honestly rather live in a cave. That is the reaction of a true artist. No one really schooled by the Muses each night in his dreams could countenance living among such monstrosities and ghouleries as bedevil these persons' homes. They wonder why they need drugs to sleep and to get it up, why they require a constant tweeking by doctors and chiropractors and reiki masters and pharmacists, not understanding that they have created their own little hells among their own walls, with their own expensive purchases. Their minds and bodies are quite literally corroded away day by day by the uglinesses and vulgarities that assault them from every device and console and flat surface. I would be more comfortable on a bed of nails than in a living room filled with modern art, and so would they, if they only knew it.

The soul desires to be surrounded by beauties, and only the aliens know why these people have allowed themselves to be convinced otherwise. The truth is, there is one reason and one reason only that ugly things are now sold instead of beautiful things: they are easier to produce. Anybody can create paintings like the ones above, and that anybody can create them very quickly. But beautiful paintings take time, talent, and character. No matter how much technology is available, very few people can create them. Both the paintings and the artists are rare. No one ever tells you that anymore, although it is obvious and you already know it, because it is not considered good PR, in any market. It is not good PR at *Pace Wildenstein* because it conflicts with progressive politics, where everyone is equal. And it is not good even in realism, because realists make most of their money teaching. These realist teachers have to keep telling their students that art is something anyone can do, in order to generate more students. "All you need is my booklet and my patented palette and my 12-step process, and you too can paint like Leonardo!" It isn't good for business to tell students the truth: no amount of work will make you an artist if you aren't already an artist. Practice makes a born artist a better artist; it cannot make an artist out of a non-artist. Art is not equal access any more than the NBA is equal access. People do not have a right to be an artist, any more than they have a right to be President or to be 7 feet tall. Yes, all people have some sort of right or freedom to paint, if they like, just as they have the right to sing or

dance or play baseball. But that doesn't mean they have the right to go on *American Idol* or to dance with the stars or play with the Yankees. Hockney seems to think he has a right to paint like Sargent, and it is very sad. His success with the fake galleries and the fake clients increases his feelings of unfairness, but there it is. He will never paint like Sargent because he is Hockney. Even if he learned the brushwork, he would still choose to paint something boring and ugly, and it would all be for nought.

Someone needs to tell all these rich and famous people that they are pathetic and deluded, and I guess that is my job. They blow their smoke and I blow it right back in their sorry faces. I am not impressed by their galleries or their homes or their stupid conversations. I don't care how much money they have or what other jack-offs they know or how many American Express titanium cards they have up their asses. Their movies suck, their songs suck, their art sucks, and their books suck. They look like idiots talking about themselves on Charlie Rose or Oprah or Letterman, and I would rather listen to the birds sing than go to a Hollywood party or Chelsea party. I would rather listen to goats fart than listen to those phony bastards talk about themselves. When was the last time any one of them created anything of beauty? As with Eitel, I have to ask, "Why are we listening to them?" Why are they famous? Why are they being interviewed? The pretty ones can sit there and shut up: they are prettier without talking. The rest of them can just fuck off.

The Many Failures of Modernism

by Miles Mathis



Before I proceed to the main thesis of this paper, I would like to finalize an argument that I have just touched upon in other places. That argument concerns the terminology of Modernism. In most of my papers I use Modernism to refer broadly to post-classical or post-traditional art. I do not honestly think anyone has had trouble understanding what I mean when I do this, although many Modernist readers have tried to invent problems. Most people will understand that when I say Modernist readers, I mean readers who disagree with my main thesis—readers who like the avant garde or modernism or postmodernism or the trend by any other name. These readers like novelty and theory and politics and don't care so much about technique or figuration or traditional subject matter or even expression. In the same way, every rational person will understand what Modernism is—a category that includes all works influenced by the redefining of art in the early part of the 20th century.

To be more specific for a moment, I will drop a couple of dates and names. I have said before that 1917 and Duchamp loom large in defining these terms. Not that there were no Modern works before 1917 or that there were no Modern artists before Duchamp. But Duchamp put a finer point on what had come before. In fact, it might be said that he put about as fine a point on it as could be put, and that

no one has done any amount of important sharpening since. Up until the teens there had been a lot of things going on simultaneously. Conventions were being dropped, expression was being promoted, politics was being absorbed into art, and theory was making huge inroads. What Duchamp did is to focus all these things. He found expression to be gratuitous, so he melded theory and politics and jettisoned everything else. By dropping all conventions and all expression, he was left with a politically tinged theory that wholly defined the artifact. In fact, it was the *act* of dropping the conventions and the expression that *was* the political theory. The art was not the artifact; the art was the act of dropping the conventions and forms and expression.

Contemporary critics have invented a distinction between modernism and postmodernism and post-postmodernism. They claim that something changed around 1970 and then again around 1990. No one is too sure what that something is, and I for one think it is just a sales ruse—a bit of prestidigitation to fool people into thinking something is actually happening. But I assure you that nothing actually is.

Many of these critics would no doubt say that my choice of examples proves my confusion, since Duchamp's *Fountain* is postmodern (or a postmodern precursor) not Modern. But which of us is confused, the one who has the seminal work of postmodernism coming *before* High Modernism (1917 is before 1945 on my calendar), or the one who points out the confusion?

The answer to this question is clear, as is my contention that the current groupings and terms and dates must all be thrown out as a conglomeration of contradictions. The analysts have quite simply failed to gather all the recent data into any comprehensible form. Some people may find a certain *jouissance* in artworks that make no sense, but a critical overview of a century that makes no sense lacks all piquancy. It is not an amusing annoyance, it is an annoying annoyance.

My enemies always attack me for not dropping all the names at the right places, for not being *au courant* on all the new isms and groupings and subgroupings. For not calling Damien Hirst a Brit Art man and for not calling Warhol a Pop Art phenomenon, and other such things. As if the term “Brit Art” has any content. What is the term Brit Art telling us? That Damien is from Britain? Is that information crucial? Is there any substance to the term “Pop Art”? No. It is just a tag. Using it is a clue to insiders that you have studied closely and accepted all the naming and grouping, and that you find this naming and grouping interesting and poignant. Well, I don't. It is all a complete waste of time, conceptually very close to counting angels on the head of a pin or arguing about transubstantiation and consubstantiation or memorizing who begat whom in the Old Testament. It is all a fiction anyway, and you might just as well memorize elven genealogies in *Lord of the Rings* or memorize *Friends* trivia as waste time memorizing the subsubisms of 20th century art.

Nothing important has changed since 1917. Modernism bottomed out at that point. Five minutes after it was invented it hit bedrock. It “said” all it had to say. A complete theoretical deconstruction had been achieved, and the rest has been a bombing of the surface of the moon, a strafing of barren ground. “Artists” since Duchamp have been on a seek-and-destroy mission, stomping on any blasted

bush that had managed to survive the nuclear wind. The critics huddled round and cheered loudly at the stomping, elevating each withered crunch into an act of heroism.

Can anyone imagine a more arid pastime, a more pathetic group of lonely and talentless people? It would, I think, surpass the creative invention of all the novelists and poets and artists and philosophers of past centuries to conjure up such a bleak stretch of art history. Only Nietzsche approached the ability to imagine it, and I think it can be argued that even the idea of the lastman doesn't really do it justice. The artists and critics of Modernism were not cows blinking in the sun, the metaphor Nietzsche used for the lastman. Cows blinking in the sun are harmless—useful even. They are good to paint, to eat, to milk, and they keep the grass green and mowed. Beyond this they are cute and give everyone a cozy feeling. The artists and critics of the 20th century were far from cute and cuddly. They were not even as useful as a swarm of locusts or a great prairie fire. These natural catastrophes at least leave the ground fertile behind them. The artists and critics swept over the earth, consuming all leaf and flesh, and yet left no ash or manure for future growth. They were like modern governments: masters of desertification. Entire seas dried up in the 20th century, and art was another of these.

Just as I know more than I would want to admit about *Friends* trivia and *Lord of the Rings* genealogy and Biblical minutiae, I also know a good deal more about the details of 20th century art than I let on. This I file away as “know thy enemy”. If I do not use all the approved terms in the approved ways you can be sure it is not because I am ignorant of the passwords. I do not use the passwords for three reasons: 1) I do not want entry. I do not want to be mistaken for one who is clubbable in this club, 2) I do not accept the truth of the terms. Using the terms implies that you find them useful. I don't. 3) I prefer to antagonize my antagonists. By not using the approved terms, I let them know that the terms are not worth using. This makes them angry, which is pleasant in itself.

Now on to the main thesis. I have just argued that the artists and critics of the past 90 years have existed on inventing distinctions. They have fabricated a long list of quibbles and cavils, have dreamed up a million volumes of manufactured analysis. Now I will argue that they have completely missed the important distinctions. It is possible that they have seen these distinctions and have preferred to ignore them. But either way we have been educated *ad infinitum* on the inessential, while the essential has remained obscure.

In another paper I have talked about the beginnings of Modernism. In that paper I used Cezanne as example, as I will here again. However, that paper was concerned with other issues, and I did not make the distinctions I will make here (although I will cover basically the same period of art history). What I want to do now is draw a very sharp line between Modernism and pre-Modernism. The 20th century critics almost always gave the Impressionist, post-Impressionists, Expressionists, Fauves, Picasso, Munch, the Symbolists, and so on, to Modernism. I will give them back to pre-Modernism. The important historical line is not in the mid or late 19th century, it is in the early 20th century. It is the line drawn by Duchamp on or around 1917.

Before I offer you the distinctions that allow me to give all these artists and isms back to pre-Modernism, I will tell you my motive for doing so. This may seem an unorthodox method of arguing—both too revelatory and too topsy-turvy—but what the hell. Many contemporary realists seem to accept the lines drawn by the avant garde. That is, they, like the critics, want Modernism to start with the Impressionists. These realists think Impressionism was the first major error, and their greatest dream is to return to a time before Manet. They tend to look more favorably on Ingres, and many would probably throw out Delacroix without much urging. The only thing they are interested in keeping after 1850 is the academics like Bouguereau and Waterhouse and Lord Leighton.

I don't agree with this opinion at all. I like both Ingres and Delacroix, and I like both Bouguereau and Gauguin. I don't want to throw out any of them. Nor do I want to throw out Munch or Picasso or Kandinsky or van Gogh or a lot of others. As for the Impressionists, I have very little problem with them beyond the fact that they were oversold in the 20th century. I am weary of them, but not because they offend me or threaten me artistically. And if I don't like Cezanne, it is not for theoretical reasons. It is for artistic reasons. I find his work ugly and mostly expressionless. I consider him a failure as an artist. But I do not think he intended to destroy tradition.

This takes me from motive to argument. Anyone who reads of the life of Van Gogh or Cezanne or any of the rest can see that the intention of artists in this period was not to destroy tradition. Destroying tradition hardly seemed like an option in 1880, much less in 1850. After all, the Impressionists were forced to show separately *because* the Salon—tradition—was so powerful. Artists from Manet to Picasso had no idea of destroying tradition; all they wanted was a bit of freedom to create an alternative to it. If you read Van Gogh's letters you will see that he had a great respect for tradition. The same can be said of Manet, Cezanne and Picasso. They would not have become artists if they had no respect for tradition. Van Gogh would have been dumbfounded by the idea that classical art could come to an end within the lifetime of his contemporaries. Not only dumbfounded, but distressed. This was a man who worked as hard at technical mastery as anyone in history. All his toil did not take him where the *Prix de Rome* winners' toils took them, and his toil perhaps didn't take him exactly where he wanted to go in the beginning, but someone who wanted to destroy tradition wouldn't have toiled at all. Did Duchamp toil? No. For Duchamp it was ultimately pointless to learn to paint. For Van Gogh it was the most important thing.

The Armory Show of 1913 has also been called a great turning point. In some ways it was. It was the first major show of the new art in the US. It greatly affected the market. But for me even the Armory Show was pre-Modern. Duchamp was still doing figure painting! Even Kandinsky and Picabia were not wholly abstract. Their paintings had titles like "Garden of Love" or "The Procession". Really weird for the time, yes, but not yet wholly determined by theory. Color, form, paint quality, design—all still very important. And most of the other works were outright figuration. Matisse has pretty little dancing figures, a nude, and a couple of portraits. Munch and Puvis have their Christs and Madonnas. And so on.

If you have only two categories and you have to put all the Armory works in one or the other, which would it be? Modernism or pre-Modernism? Or, to put it another way, do all these works have

more in common with Titian and Velasquez and Delacroix, or do they have more in common with Duchamp's *Fountain* and Warhol's soup cans and Hirst's shark? The critics have said that because they are all weird in some way, they belong with the latter. They are pushing the boundaries, they deal in novelty.

Yes, they do, but this is not the crucial distinction of Modernism. A lot of art in history has pushed boundaries and dealt in novelty. Leonardo pushed boundaries and dealt in novelty.

I maintain that the Armory Show works belong with pre-Modernism, and the reason they do is that they are not defined mostly or entirely by theory. It is true that some have a large dose of theory propping them up. Picabia and Duchamp and Picasso are already trafficking pretty heavily in theory. But at this point they have not yet crossed over. As for Matisse and the rest, theory is a small part of the whole. Theory allows them a few freedoms, but theory does not define the work. Lots of people who know nothing of theory like Matisse and Munch and Kandinsky and Redon and Van Gogh and Cezanne and Puvis, and it is easy to see why. You have figures and/or pretty colors and/or trees and/or subject matter. Most people who know nothing of theory do not like Modern art, including Duchamp's *Fountain* or Warhol's soup cans or John's flags or Rauschenberg's assemblages or Newman's stripes or Twombly's scribbles or Nauman's concepts, and, again, it is easy to see why. What's to like? The theory is the only thing with any possible appeal, and if you take that away, you have next to nothing. This is the crucial distinction.

Of course, by this definition, even Pollock and Rothko fail to be completely Modern, since they are not altogether defined by theory. At least here we have real paint on real canvas and we have pretty colors and patterns. In this way they are dangerously traditional, and I think that if they hadn't been so popular with decorators and the general public, Modernism would probably have found some way to discredit them. In fact, many critics attempted to do just this, and for the exact reasons I have just mentioned.

The hardest artists to categorize are of course the major artists who straddle the year 1917. Even after that year, Picasso never got around to being just a theorist. His early work is almost classical, as everyone admits. Then his work until 1906 is experimental but hardly offensive to anyone. After that he takes bigger and bigger draughts of theory, until, in the late teens, he gets very close to disappearing into theory. But then he gets bored of it and makes various comebacks. His fame allows him to do this. Almost no one besides Picasso was allowed so much content, and even he took heavy critical hits for it.

Kandinsky also starts out traditional, veers into a lovely childlike naivete, and then discovers the dark side of theory. I find the Kandinsky of 1910 very appealing; in 1920, not at all. What happened? 1917 happened. Before 1917, Kandinsky was a colorist and his lines were curving and expressive. After circa 1917 he was not mainly a colorist and his lines were straight and sharp and mathematical. He was a theorist. He had gone from pre-Modernism to Modernism: his work was defined mainly by theory. Throw out the theory and the work has little appeal.

Max Ernst show this very clearly, too. Ernst is rarely Modern. Only with works like *The Hat Makes the Man* are we predominantly in the realm of theory. This work is straight pre-Warhol. At most other times Ernst is an anomaly, far away from the main line of Modernism, like a 20th century Bosch. My favorite work of his, *The Attirement of the Bride*, is Modern only by date. It is far more closely related to Bosch than to the work of Ernst's contemporaries in the 20's and 30's. This does not mean that Modernism is multi-faceted and nearly all-inclusive. It means that the only time artists generated any interest is when they ignored Modern theory. The critics didn't appreciate Ernst ignoring them, and that is probably the main reason he isn't as famous as Duchamp or Warhol, although he is a far greater artist.

If I have argued that Kandinsky and Picasso and even Duchamp were still pre-Modern in 1913, then you will expect that Cezanne and Van Gogh and the 19th artists are even less Modern. In fact, I don't think they are Modern at all. They don't belong in Modern museums, much less contemporary museums. They would not like to be there if you asked them. Van Gogh is one step away from Delacroix but a thousand steps away from Duchamp 1917. VG would have nothing but contempt for Duchamp and Warhol and all the rest. This applies equally to Cezanne and Gauguin. Cezanne and Gauguin were not anti-artists, not by the greatest stretch of the imagination. They were a bit anti-Salon, but this is a very different thing. Gauguin had no more desire to destroy art or tradition than Baudelaire had, or Whistler, or Rodin. He felt it necessary to fight certain manifestations of tradition, as they all did (and as did Giotto, Caravaggio, El Greco, and Goya). But how could someone who was depicting beautiful naked girls with pretty colors on a canvas want to destroy western art? The contention is absurd. He didn't want the Salon or the galleries to tell him what or how to paint. Nor do I. You might as well say that I want to destroy art and tradition.

The distinction that everyone fails to make is between what the artists did and said and what the critics have tried to *tell* us they did and said. That is, the myth of Impressionism and post-Impressionism and Expressionism and Symbolism was created by the critics, not by the works or the words of the artists themselves. Cezanne was not Modern; he did not want to destroy art or tradition. Van Gogh was not interested in novelty for its own sake; he was not a precursor to the main line of 20th century art. Redon was not interested mainly in theory. Nor Matisse nor Whistler nor Rodin nor Monet nor any of the rest. All would be horrified by the direction art history has taken. The clearest example is once again Van Gogh. Van Gogh is further away from Modernism than even Ingres is. Ingres was more interested in formalism and theory than Van Gogh. Even Delacroix was more modern than Van Gogh, in the sense that Delacroix was more aware of his forms and his media. Van Gogh was mainly an intuitionist, which puts him at the furthest possible remove from the self-conscious formalisms and theorizings of the 20th century. I absolutely guarantee you that VG would hate Johns and Newman more than he hated Bouguereau or Tissot. VG is two steps away from Bouguereau; he is a googol parsec away from Newman.

Some will wonder what I am going to call the period from 1880 to 1917 if I don't call it Modern. Those who think I have just called postmodernism Modernism will wonder how I am going to categorize all the things that used to be Modern. The short answers are that I am not going to call the period anything and that I don't need a third category. These short answers are made possible by the fact that we have only two broad categories to start with. The period from 1880 to 1917 is just a mixing of the traditional definition and the Modern definition of art, and any artwork you could offer me for consideration I would call more or less Modern depending on how much it is influenced by critical theory. The Impressionists and post-Impressionists are wholly traditional, in the sense that any novelty is only the outcome of *aesthetic* theory. They are no more modern than Delacroix or Goya or even Fragonard, whose novelties were all determined by strictly artistic choices—that is to say, these choices were in service of a visual and emotional effect. Munch is also wholly traditional by this definition. Artworks after 1917 can be judged in the same way. Pollock and Rothko don't require a third category to explain them. Color and design and expression make them traditional. Jettisoning other conventions makes them partly Modern.

Duchamp is the dividing line and defining line because he is the first to be 100% critical theory and therefore 100% Modern. *Fountain* has no aesthetic qualities, and its novelty is not an outcome of any aesthetic theory. It is an outcome of critical theory. Which is to say that it is all analysis and no synthesis.

So I have not created three periods, I have only created two. What I called pre-Modernism above is simply traditional art. Traditional works may have more or less novelty and invention, and may be influenced more or less by artistic or aesthetic theory, but they are influenced very little by critical theory. Once again, aesthetic theory is a synthetic theory that is concerned with creating emotion or beauty. Critical theory is an analytic theory that is concerned with ideas and definitions.

In my opinion, there are no Modern works before 1906. Cezanne and a couple of others arguably had some amount of critical content, but the work was not defined by it. Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O.J. version) probably has enough critical content that it can go either way. It also has a lot of aesthetic content. The Futurists are the first movement to be defined by critical theory. Cubism and futurism were both jelling in 1909, as was total abstraction, but I think Futurism beat Cubism to the punch. I say this because the Futurists wrote their own manifestoes and this clearly gave the critical intent to the artists themselves. In abstraction and cubism there is still a strong mixture of aesthetic theory. In futurism the critical theory predominates without any doubt. Early on Duchamp was influenced by both the Futurists and Cubists, but *Fountain* comes right out of the theory of Futurism. The Futurists were anti-past, anti-museum, and anti-art, and this is where Modernism was headed—it is where it still is today. 1909 might therefore be called the zero-year of Modernism. 1917 is its peak year, and it has re-hit this peak in every decade since, like old-time clockwork.

Most art historians tell us that Futurism died with the Futurists in WWI. But Futurism has never died. The contemporary avant garde is still defined mainly by Futurism. All the big name artists are now Futurists. No matter what they are doing in form or content, they have accepted the basic stance of the Futurists: anti-past, anti-museum, anti-art. They may gladly hang in museums, since this is how

they get famous, but they are sure to ironically undercut this process every step of the way. Some may incorporate forms of the past—may borrow, steal, sample, or copy styles or poses or models—but never as an homage, only as a mockery. They are anti-museum and anti-past because they are anti-art: they are anti-expression and anti-depth and anti-subtlety and anti-beauty. This is the explanation of Currin and Richter and the rest. Why should these artists go to such lengths to achieve "vacant images" and "ironic distance" and "purposeful banality". Because they are the Futurists of the moment.

All this means that recent art history has been sliced up in the wrong way, no matter who is doing the slicing. The avant garde and the classicists and the new pluralists all have it wrong. All seem to me to have a very basic misunderstanding of what art is about. The avant garde believes that art is defined by theory and politics and abstract formal qualities. It is not. The classicists believe that art is defined by technique and subject matter. It is not. The new pluralists believe that technique and subject matter should be reintroduced as an adjunct and support to Theory, since the 20th century must be respected as a time of great progress. Neither of these beliefs is true. The 20th century was mostly a horrible wasteland of presumption, laziness, greed, pretense, and deception. Propping up this list with technique and subject matter will not change its character. The perfect example of this is John Currin. Technique and subject matter may at first fill some of the largest holes in the plaster, but they will not rebuild the tower. Technique and subject matter are useful to art only when they are wedded to a proper definition of art and artist. Technicians become artists only when all the proper ingredients come together at once. As it is, we have a long list of ingredients, but most of these ingredients simply prevent the cake from rising. Politics, theory, novelty, formalism: all these ingredients are pollutants. Not only do they fail to compel or impel art, they impede it. They prevent it.

Technique can also impede art. The classicists will find this blasphemous, but it is true nonetheless. It is not true in the sense that the Moderns have tried to tell us. Technique is not a *necessary* impedance. In fact, some rather large amount of technique is surely a requirement. But a slavish regard for technique is fatal to art. It always has been, from medieval icons painted without a sliver of expression or a marten hair's variation from the pattern, to academic works painted without a dot of inspiration or personality, to photo-realist works that are not a single pixel away from reality. Technique cannot stand alone any more than expression can stand alone or theory can stand alone or forms can stand alone.

If the critics have manufactured inessential distinctions and missed the crucial distinctions, they can hardly be of any use. Criticism is analysis, and a critic who cannot analyze a large mass of data into its important piles is a superfluous person. More than that, he is a pest. No, even more, he is an enemy, a person not just to be avoided but to be actively resisted. Someone whose influence one has an *obligation* to counteract and oppose, not just for the sake of ones own field and owns own well being, but for the sake of art history.

This is another one of the central facts of the 20th century, since that period is not simply defined by the influence of the critic and administrator, but also by the silence of the artist. In that time, the artist did not consider art history to be his birthright and obligation. If anything, he felt this way only about the act of painting or sculpting. Arguing and fighting was either beneath him or beyond him or just too damn unpleasant. He had recourse to a thousand excuses: he was outnumbered, the tide was inexorable, history was unstoppable, “there is no going back”, “what can one person do?” and so on. All patently false and absurd, since history and the tide are determined by people and since numbers have nothing to do with it. Michelangelo and Titian were also outnumbered by non-artists and administrators. The Impressionists were outnumbered, Whistler was outnumbered. Everyone who ever did anything was outnumbered, since he was one person. Doing the right thing is not a statistical question. As Thoreau said, you cannot wait until everyone else does the right thing in order to act yourself. He asked, do I wait upon my neighbors’ example to eat my own dinner? No, I eat my bread when I am hungry and speak my truth as I learn it. Waiting for leadership from others, if generalized, is a guarantee of inaction.

It is just this inaction that Modernism encourages and relies upon. Modern governments and institutions—including the institutions of art—discourage hierarchies for very good reasons. Hierarchies require and promote leadership. All the cries against elitism also work as insurance against leadership. A community of equals has no leaders. Without leaders there is no action, and the status quo becomes even more entrenched than in aristocracies. Equality is the ultimate guarantee of stasis, since no one feels qualified to publicly disagree.

In this way, Modernism’s promotion of a flat egalitarianism becomes easier to understand. No one but a fascist would argue against equal opportunity, but it has always been difficult to understand the theoretical appeal to anyone of a field or society with no top end, with nothing to strive for and nothing to attain. Modern capitalism has countered this “communitistic” situation by keeping the hierarchy of wealth. Money is the goal that keeps the culture moving. All other hierarchies are suppressed. Culture moves in the sense that the economy grows: people keep going to work rather than sit at home and collect welfare. But culture does not move in any other way. Art history and all non-financial arenas stop. This suits Modernism fine, since it is the entrenched institution of the moment. As long as leadership remains obsolescent Modernism will remain the entrenched institution of the permanent static future.

Of course this is just the opposite of the way we should want it, whether we are artists or not. The only way that communism or socialism was ever theoretically attractive was as an economic theory. If any hierarchy was going to be suppressed, it should have been the hierarchy of unearned wealth. Then we keep all the other hierarchies to give people things to strive for and attain. We give them prestige and status as they become masters of their respective fields. This both allows an outlet for ambition and propels society.

The various socialisms and capitalisms are all failing “spiritually” for the same reason: they have jettisoned the most meaningful attainments in the lives of men and women. The various world

governments have so far avoided collapse by filling the empty spaces with money and material goods, but money and material goods cannot fill the important spaces in the lives of men and women.

You can see that my political argument is analogous to my artistic argument. In art I am neither modern nor contemporary-classical, since I have argued that both positions are fundamentally flawed. The stresses are in all the wrong places. In regard to capitalism and communism, I am once again iconoclastic, and in precisely the same way. I support all the hierarchies *except* the one that has been kept. Recent history is therefore completely upside down and inside out. In both art and politics we have a bilateral argument in which each side is fundamentally in error. The left wants equality of achievement, which is suffocating in every possible way. Its effects exceed any possible outcome of a logical communism, since a logical theory would be mainly economic. A communism limited to economics could actually feed cultural hierarchies by impelling more talent into non-financial fields and enterprises.

The right resists the left by holding on for dear life to the raft of capitalism, that is, onto the raft of potential wealth and potential economic disparity. All other hierarchies are given only lip service. Art and religion are sometimes thrown a bone, but it doesn't amount to much. In this situation it is true that capitalism is an important floatation device for culture. It really does stave off imminent collapse. In a milieu where all other hierarchies have been quashed, a removal of the wealth hierarchy would spell immediate doom.

But of course this description of the situation fails to mention alternatives. You can see that it is not a question of a wealth hierarchy or no hierarchy at all, as we are led to believe by the opposing parties. Why can we not resuscitate the traditional hierarchies of achievement? Why can we not have masters and leaders and sages and so on, in any number of fields?

We do have a few remaining pseudo-hierarchies. We have hierarchies in sports and entertainment, but these hierarchies are either mostly manufactured and illusory, or they are simply unimportant. The entertainment hierarchy belongs to the first category and the sports hierarchy to the second. You cannot build a stable culture on sports and entertainment. You can only build a delusional and manufactured and trivial culture on such foundations, and that is what we have.

The specific answer to this problem is to de-prioritize the existing hierarchies, which are trivial or counterproductive, and to re-prioritize hierarchies that are both meaningful and useful to a healthy culture. Sports and entertainment hierarchies must be de-emphasized while artistic, cultural, and pedagogical hierarchies are re-established. Once ambitions and talents can be deflected into these fields, then we can begin to diminish the profit motive and the wealth hierarchy. I am not suggesting that we should completely dismantle this hierarchy, either. I don't think that is either wise or feasible. But it can certainly be downgraded from current levels. Just going back 50 years would be a start. Was the US in the 50's such an awful place for rich people to live? The right wants to return to the 50's socially, but economically this is looked upon as torture.

It is obvious how all this would affect the field of art. Art would be one of the first beneficiaries of a proper re-stratification. Currently we have an absolute dumbing-down of content and form in the name of political anti-elitism, so that artifacts are now intentionally indistinguishable from garbage. But we still create an elite simply by paying certain artists exorbitant sums for garbage. All we have to do is recognize how upside down this is, and reverse it. The elitism that is misplaced is the elitism in creating millionaires for nothing. The *unfairness* is in the elitism of unearned wealth. So do away with it and replace it by an elitism that is logical and fair—an elitism we should embrace. That elitism is the difference in quality of various artworks and artists. Some artists in the past created more beautiful or meaningful works. Michelangelo was elite and deserved to be. He earned it. There was no unfairness involved. This is the sort of elitism we need to return to. A hierarchy of true ability.

No one disagrees with this when it is stated in simple straightforward language. No one but the small and envious could argue against the usefulness to culture of true ability. If this is so then we must flee unclear thinking and writing as well as the old unanalyzed hierarchies. With all the social critique and analysis we have had in the last century, one would think all had been said again and again. But it is not so. I have shown that we have still failed to do basic analysis of common words such as “elitism”, which we think we must either embrace or deny. I have shown that elitism is not a black or white term. We must logically embrace it in some situations and deny it in others. There are hundreds of other words and ideas sitting in full view, used a million times daily, without a full understanding of what they mean.

I am not suggesting a full semantic overhaul, which I would find as tiresome as anyone else. This is not mainly a question of semantics. The definitions are already there and the points I am making are not really subtle distinctions. What I am suggesting is simply turning the lights back on. How hard is it to see that Michelangelo is a better artist than Andy Warhol? How hard would it be to start encouraging real art again instead of garbage?

For that matter, how hard is it to see that a financial or economic definition of life is shallow and uninteresting? You don’t have to be a Harvard (or Yale) graduate to see that. So, *do something else*. Stop talking about economics and garbage art and start talking about more important things. Start *doing* more important things. When that happens, a complete cultural reverse will have been immediately achieved, without the passage of a single law or the implementation of a single policy.

The Fundamental Theorem of Modernity *and why it is false*

by Miles Mathis



AP / Michael Sohn

What might be called the fundamental theorem of modernity is the usually implicit belief that all people are equal, that all people are of equal worth, or that all people are equal in the eyes of God. This theorem underlies the modern interpretation of democracy, the modern interpretation of art, the modern interpretation of sociology, the modern interpretation of politics, and it is the core belief beneath the modern psychology of nearly all self-help books and therapies. Because this fundamental theorem is false, it undermines the entire structure of modern life, from voting to relationships to business to art.

Variations on this fundamental theorem are true, which is why it is so seductive, so widespread, and so hard to tease out of its category. The category this theorem inhabits is the category of equalities. Similar theorems include the theorem of equal opportunity, the theorem of equality under the law, the theorem of equal rights, the theorem of equal pay for equal work, and so on. All these theorems are all true, I believe, in that they are useful to society as well as to individuals. Some will quibble about my use of the word “true” here, as well as my use of the word “theorem.” but I think my intent and meaning are clear. All these ideas or beliefs or theorems have a possible logic to them, and a possible use, used rightly. They do not necessarily conflict with human nature or with the obvious facts.

To start with, none of these equalities assumes or demands that all people are equal. Equal opportunity, for instance, actually has nothing to do with the equality of people. Equal opportunity maximizes potential. In fact, equal opportunity assumes that people are *not* equal: equal opportunity is a way for people to prove themselves. Everyone is given a fair chance to succeed, and those with more talent must succeed more. If all people were equal, they would not be required to prove themselves, and

opportunity would be meaningless. If people are guaranteed success, they do not need opportunity. Guaranteed success is not opportunity, it is social engineering of the most unnatural and fascist sort.

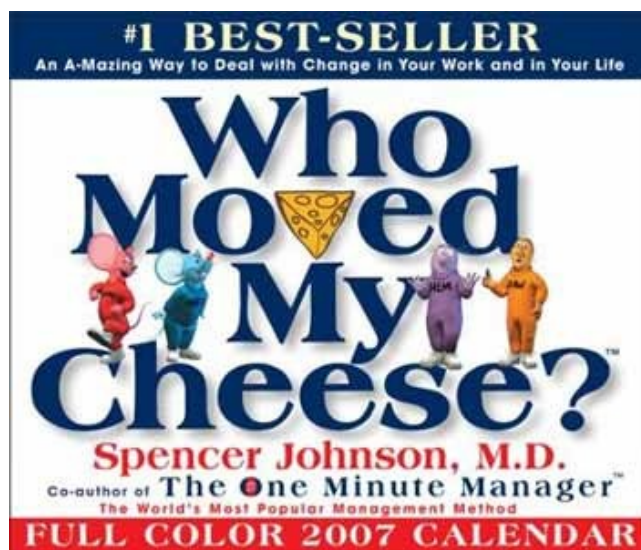
Equality under the law is another idea that has progressed as civilization has progressed. It gained ground with the Magna Carta and flowered during the Enlightenment. After the French and American revolutions, it became legal bedrock, although it is still preached more than it is practiced. Many seem to think that it goes hand in hand with the equality of people, but once again it has nothing to do with the equality of people. It is the great inequality of people that necessitates equality under the law. Without the law, weak and ignorant people would not be able to prevail in court against the strong and clever. Even with the law, weak and ignorant people find it difficult to prevail, in court and out. But equality under the law attempts to insert a degree of fairness into proceedings that were always more a matter of power. In this sense, equality under the law is not really “natural,” in that nature tends to prefer the stronger and more clever in all situations, but the law is logical nonetheless, since law, by definition, is not about power but about rectitude or rightness. As a legal matter, weak and ignorant people are just as likely to be in the right as strong or clever people. One might say they are *more* likely to be in the right. They are certainly more in need of the strength of the law in fighting stronger or more clever people, assuming they *are* in the right.

But the idea that people are equal, in worth or the eyes of God, has no possible proof or logic to it. We can immediately throw out the second variation of this idea, since only God can see through his eyes. No one has any idea what God thinks of us or our theorems. I do not need to even broach the question of the existence of God, since even if I took it as given that he exists, we have no way of knowing how he ranks us, or whether he ranks us at all. I will be told that the various religious texts inform us of this, but even if I take it as given that they are true, it turns out that they tell us the opposite. The religious texts tell us that God *does* rank us, if not by beauty or cleverness or acts, then at least by moral rectitude or by obedience or by predestination or by baptism or by some other method. All the religions are a ranking, if not from angels to devils, then in some other fashion. Not one major historical religion teaches that all people are special, that all people are equal, or that all people deserve equal recognition. Buddhism, which many modern people believe is more advanced than Christianity, on just this topic, does not teach equality. As a prime example, consider *His Holiness* the Dalai Lama. What theorem of equality could include the idea of holiness? You must have more holy people and less holy people. The Dalai Lama is not considered to be just like everyone else. He is considered to be very special and rare.

Equality in the eyes of God is not an ancient idea at all: it is a modern bastardization of one of the other equalities. It is an outgrowth and offshoot, not of any religion, but of modern politics and law. It does not come from the Bible or any other ancient text. It comes from a slipshod reading of recent political history, namely of the French and American and Russian Revolutions. Because these revolutions overthrew the old hierarchies, modern people believe that *all* hierarchies are gone. But it is even shallower than that. Most modern people don't know enough about recent history to misread it: they have gotten their misconceptions directly from self-help books and therapies and Oprah.

The first thing to understand about self-help books and therapies and TV programs is that they were all produced to sell. To sell most efficiently they must appeal to the largest audience. The largest audience

is an audience of average people. Exceptional people don't read self-help books because they don't need to. They can solve problems on their own and so they don't have high levels of dissatisfaction with themselves. Complete losers don't read self-help books because they can't even achieve that level of living. Either they can't read or can't afford the book or can't find the library or can't get out of the institution. Self-help books are read by people who can read fairly well and who have enough intelligence and insight to realize (perhaps subconsciously) that they aren't exceptional in any way. But they don't have enough intelligence and insight to read real books or to study life in any rigorous fashion.



The self-help book is written to appeal to the abilities and disabilities of the average person, and to confirm them. Average people who know they are average aren't insecure and don't read these books. But, due to the fundamental theorem, most average people cannot admit they are average. Average people believe they are all equal, but they believe they are all equal in an *infinite capability*. That is, they are all equally spectacular or glorious or infinite or unbounded. Ironically, insecurity isn't caused by inequality, it is caused by average people being told that all people are equal, and equally *great*. If they believe that all people are equal, or should be, they must be traumatized every time they meet someone who can do something they can't do.

In the past, average people weren't commonly insecure, at least not psychologically. They might have been financially insecure, but they didn't spend much time worrying about the sort of issues modern people worry about. Partly this is because society was highly stratified. Social inequality was the rule. But it is also because these average people, when they read, read texts like the Bible, which were full of other inequalities. If these people were envious of upper classes, they did not long for equality. No, they substituted the promised hierarchies in heaven for the current hierarchies on earth. These aristocrats might be rich now, but they, the meek, would win after death or the judgment. This attitude is certainly delusional, but it doesn't lead to the sort of catastrophic and pandemic insecurity we see now.

Only in modern Western societies do average people read and recite and believe that people are equal. And it is this belief that feeds their insecurity. They read that they are supposed to be as good as the next guy, but they can see with their own eyes that the next guy is prettier or more clever or taller or thinner or richer or plays the banjo better or makes funnier jokes or beats them at badminton. If they weren't force fed a constant line of equality, they could pass these things off as the way of nature. But because they were weaned on equality, raised on equality, and daily drowned in equality, they must think something is very wrong with them. According to equality, they should be able to learn the piano with ease, achieve a scratch handicap in a matter of weeks, and earn six figures with little effort: by putting post-it notes on the refrigerator and chanting the correct twelve-step mantras each night before bed. When these things inevitably fail, they feel very pathetic indeed. Not unequal, but truly cursed and clueless. Someone with average ability might be expected to fail at difficult endeavors, but since everyone is believed to have an infinite capability, only the misguided and misplaced could fail.

The self-help book—and its onscreen equivalents—is actually one of the most mischievous and malicious inventions in recent history. It uses the fundamental theorem to exploit another grave error of modernity. The self-help book is used to address insecurity, and insecurity is caused by lack of achievement. The only real way to achieve more is to learn more skills or attain more knowledge, but the self-help book does not and cannot admit this. It cannot admit it because the reader cannot admit it. The reader desires a quick answer to a big question, and so the writer tries to give it to him. The reader either cannot or will not devote the time and energy to studying serious questions or skills in a serious manner, and so all real achievement is out of the question. The self-help book solves this problem by denying it is a problem. According to the self-help book, self-regard is not a product of achievement or work or talent or natural gifts: it is a frame of mind and nothing more. You don't have to *do* anything, you only need to change the way you think.

Learning to love yourself is a cliché of modern thought. Do you achieve this by becoming more lovable in any way? No, you achieve it by *telling yourself* that you are just as good as other people. That is, you achieve it by fiat. You make up a rule or law, based on no logic, with no possible proof and lots of obvious disproof, against all the evidence of your own eyes, and you grip it as your last possible life raft.

This method must fail, of course, and the writers of the self-help book count on it failing. The publishers count on it failing. The psychologists count on it failing. Oprah counts on it failing. Because when it fails, what do you do? You go buy another self-help book!

And when all the self-help books and therapies and programs fail, you feel ten times as miserable as when you started on this process. Other people, to whom you are equal, are being helped by these books and programs. It says so in block print on the back cover of the book. They are reaching all levels of self-realization and self-satisfaction, simply by posting clichés on the refrigerator and chanting mantras, so what is wrong with you?

This is the modern method in a thousand fields: psychology, dieting, dating, auto repair, you name it. The method consists of creating a circular track that is guaranteed by nature to fail, but guaranteed by

the publisher to work. All the publisher or writer or spokesman has to do is make the circular track of a certain complexity, beyond the ability of the average person to unwind, and he has a money machine. This is not difficult to do. Your average person cannot spot a flaw in a George Bush speech; how are they going to read a book and critique it? They are reading the book based on a recommendation; unless they get a second better recommendation from a smarter person, they are not going to know what to think. They are trapped by cabal of con-artists and by their own inability to analyze anything.

And here we reach another problem, created and confirmed by the self-help book and the fundamental theorem. Since all people are said to be equal, there is no possibility of a smarter person, as I put it in that last paragraph. Average people can't tell the difference between good advice and bad advice, good judgment and bad, an average friend and a brilliant friend. That is why they are reading the book in the first place, and taking the advice of someone who would recommend a self-help book. If a smarter person comes along and tells them that the whole genre is a scam, that the fundamental theorem is a hoax, and that their trusted advisor is a muddlehead, are they likely to listen? No, since this goes against everything they have been taught. To believe it would require they reorder their lives from top to bottom. It would require them to admit they were average, to admit that all people are not equal, and to admit that they hadn't a clue how to proceed on their own. Concerning this last thing, they can admit this in a very abstract and impersonal way, since they can be seen needing the help of a self-help book. But they cannot admit it in the presence of a real person. To admit it to this person would be to admit that this person was smarter than them. Since that is an impossibility, it is not possible to imagine that good advice will ever be accepted.

That is one of the main contradictions of the fundamental theorem. According to the current platitudes, it is permitted to take advice from an equal, since we are all muddling through together. If someone recommends a self-help book to you, it means that other person is also lost, which is reassuring. You don't need to feel inferior to someone like that. You don't even need to feel very grateful, since the book is already on the best-seller list. If that other person hadn't recommended it, someone else would have very soon.

But this way of thinking is bootless, since advice from an equal can have no great worth. If that person is equal to you, they know no more than you do. What can you learn from them? Learning is only possible when you have a teacher and a student, and the teacher must know more than the student.

In the modern world it is not allowed to take advice from someone who is in a better position than you are, in any way. That would be very deflating to the ego. It would be confirming the insecurity you are fleeing from so doggedly. So, in the end, it is possible only to take bad advice. Under the fundamental theorem, it is impossible to take good advice. Of course this plays right into the hands of the marketers. Good advice would solve your problems once and for all, in which case you are lost to the market.

In this way, all teaching is undermined by equality. A mentor of any real stature is not to be thought of: he or she would make a student feel really stupid. Only a mentor who is an equal can be consulted, a mentor like Oprah. An everyman or everywoman who is different only in that he or she has, purely by accident, tripped across a book on Amazon first.

Now let us look at how the fundamental theorem affects relationships. Although it might appear that equality would make relationships easier, the reverse is true. No two people are equal, but the idea of equality pollutes every relationship, even a relationship between two people that are nearly equal. Modern people expect all people to be strictly equal at all times, so they are constantly in a false position with everyone. They are wrong all the time. Every inequality, even a small inequality like that at a board game or sport, is a source of friction. And not just a natural amount of friction, as a function of normal competitiveness. No, the idea of equality multiplies every natural difference, by making it seem unnatural. If someone smarter than me beats me at chess, it is not so hard to take. But if someone who is supposed to be my equal beats me at chess over and over, I must be fantastically unlucky or fantastically cursed. There is no other explanation. Or maybe my equal is cheating. Something unfair is going on regardless. Either the fates or the cards are stacked against me. This makes me very unhappy. Unhappy once because I am being cheated. Unhappy twice because there is no redress for it. We are equal: what can I do? I already have all the laws on my side. The fundamental theorem is my guarantor of statistical victory. I should win 50% of the time at all things. But that isn't happening and I can't make it happen.

The only way to make it happen is to socialize with inferior people, and this is what modern people tend to do. Everyone is now downwardly mobile. The movement is to the more and more vulgar, in art, in sex, in all socialization and business. And I have just told you the hidden reason: equality. There is no equality, so the next best thing is inferiority. If you want to feel pretty, socialize with people who are less attractive. It is that easy. If you want to feel clever, socialize with people who are less clever. Problem solved. Instant happiness and self-regard, without the need for any real achievement, any real introspection, or any real personal progress. You can even feel happy and satisfied while backsliding into idiocy, since you will naturally seek the level of your companions. Soon you may become too stupid to hang with this crowd, and you will have to seek an even less clever bunch to stroke your ego.

People are taught that happiness and equality are the most important things, but since equality is a myth, they seek happiness. Believing in equality and seeking happiness means that you cannot socialize with people better than you are. People better than you are can only make you unhappy, since they destroy your myth and beat you at everything. Your unhappiness is magnified tenfold, since if you don't beat them 50% of the time at 50% of things, you must believe it is because you are cursed. It is not because they have skills you don't have, it is because the fates or gods have cursed you. You deserve equality, you are equal, and you still can't win.

Modern *mensen* can countenance people more interesting or talented than them only on the TV or movie screen. Onscreen, these people seem like fictional characters, made of cardboard. They are no real threat, so their talents can be enjoyed. If anyone considers it at all, they conclude that these people onscreen are just the beneficiaries of make-up and lighting and screenwriters. They think, "If I had a crew I could be just as interesting as they are."

This explains the famous depressions of onscreen people. No one has ever explained why someone like Matthew Perry or Jennifer Aniston should get depressed, much less why they should end up at Betty Ford. How could a great looking guy like Heath Ledger, with money and fame and talent and girls by the dozen end up taking every pill in the book? What need had he of anti-depressants and sleeping pills and so on? We never get as much as a theory. Heath was a victim of the fundamental theorem. We will let people be unequal onscreen, but not off. Unfortunately, Heath and Matt and Jennifer have to live most of their lives offscreen. Offscreen, talents just make people feel small. In real-life situations, no one really wants you to be funny or clever or smart or pretty. What they love you for onscreen, they hate you for offscreen. It is one thing to watch a talented person onscreen and another to live with a talented person offscreen. Listening to Frank Sinatra sing a song on the radio once a week may have been a treat. Listening to him sing those songs everyday was a pain. "Quit showing off, Frank, and come to dinner, you bastard!"

In the modern world, no one really wants to be inconvenienced with the existence of talented people, except as televised freak shows. As long as they are actors, pretending to be someone else, we can stomach them. But as themselves, they can only be monsters, throwbacks to another era. These monsters can socialize with and marry one another, but no one else wants anything to do with them.

That is also why we cannot let our visual artists exhibit any real talents. We prefer fakes and phonies who exhibit piles of nothings as art. This is because these people are not actors. They are not being someone else, some cardboard fictional character; they are offered to us as themselves. As such, we expect them to be equals. They must display very average talents, if any. Only in this way can we allow them to enter the gallery; only in this way can we allow their constructions into our homes and museums.

Only dead artists break this rule. A dead artist is like a Hollywood actor: he is like a fictional character, someone we know from a book. Leonardo is interesting at a great distance, like a storybook hero. But what modern person would want to live a day with Leonardo? He would make a modern person feel like a mouse. Who would really want to watch him paint or sculpt or play the lute? A modern person could not enjoy it: he would spend the whole time asking, "Why can't I play like that, why can't I paint like that, it isn't fair!" After five minutes he must rush out to grab a Campbell's soup can, to sooth his soul.

This must seem like an unsolvable dilemma, since most modern people will think it is a necessary evil of life. They can't see the way out of this vicious circle. But it is solvable in a minute. It is solved by jettisoning the false postulates. It is solved by discovering reason.

People are not equal and the point of life is not happiness. The problem is being told that these are fundamentals when they are not. The problem is being told they are true when they are not. I have already exploded equality, but happiness is just as airy. Happiness is not an end, it is an by-product. You cannot seek it for itself, since it is not an action or a course of action. To be happy, you must do

something tangible, something important. Doing that thing full well may make you happy. Therefore you should seek to do some important thing.

The self-help book and the modern person will not put it these terms, since an important action takes long effort. You cannot achieve an important action by desiring it or willing it or telling yourself you deserve it. You actually have to work hard over an extended period. During this period you may suffer. In fact, it may be that suffering is required for all important action. Happiness may come only at the end, and it may not come even then. Those who really achieve things understand this, but it does not stop them. Exceptional people, when they achieve exceptional things, do so because they ignore suffering, or perhaps even embrace it. Regardless, they do not flee it.

People who seek happiness seek to avoid suffering, and they think this is no more than common sense. But in avoiding suffering, they avoid reality, real work, complexity, and depth. What most readers of self-help books need is self-regard, not happiness. Self-regard is a satisfaction beyond happiness, since you can have self-regard even when you are miserable. But the average readers cannot comprehend this. It is beyond their comprehension. They do not *want* to comprehend it, and would not buy a book that told it them.

You will find a few books in history that mention suffering, but even these often lead off into a bog. Readers cannot take sense even from a sensible sentence, and if they come to recognize suffering, they tend to embrace it by seeking it out for its own sake. An entire subcategory of Christianity does this, as does an important stream of philosophy. These average (and not-so-average) readers interpret suffering as conferring an automatic depth, when it does nothing of the sort. Suffering, like happiness, is a by-product. I did not advise that it be sought out above, since it is not an end. I advised that it not be avoided. The wise do what is necessary in their work and on their path, with no concern for suffering or happiness. Both suffering and happiness are incidental and often accidental. They are not predictable; may be unavoidable. You cannot seek them and should not seek them. Seeking suffering is morbid; seeking happiness is feckless. You should seek to do good work, no matter the immediate outcome. You should do it with praise or with no praise, with money or no money, with happiness or suffering. If you do you will have self-regard. In misery and ecstasy both, you will be secure in your work. You will not suffer from insecurity, from inferiority or superiority, and so you will not need a self-help book.

To show you how new the idea of equality is, let us look at a few examples. I start with the well-known prose poem or song called *Desiderata*. This song was written in 1927, by a Christian. It has some earmarks of the modern self-help era, with lines like “Strive to be happy.” I will return to that in a moment. But one conspicuous line advises, “Do not compare yourself to others, or you will become vain and bitter. Always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.” It is this advice I want to analyze for a moment.

Equality is now thought to be a cohort of Christianity, since Christianity has been seen, in part, as a rise of the lower classes, a rise of the meek. Christianity was aimed at and preached to the lower classes from the beginning. But, as I have already shown, the actual Christian doctrine is heavy with

hierarchies and judgments based on difference in worth. This Christian writer in Baltimore in the 1920's understood that implicitly, as did all the hippies and Christians and new-agers who made *Desiderata* so popular in the 60's and 70's. They did not throw the poem in the bin after reading that line. They accepted it as a matter of course. *Desiderata* has been purged of any idea of damnation for people who are lesser in the eyes of a judging God, sifting the wheat from the chaff; but it retains, as a sort of commonsense warning, this idea of greater and lesser persons. It is as if to say, "Greater and lesser persons than you exist—get used to the idea—it is a thing like darkness and light, and cannot be argued away or wished away."

This advice is well-stated, but it is nonetheless couched in an illogical sentence. The illogic of *Desiderata* is that it accepts greatness and inequality as a fact of nature, but then advises you to do something impossible. "Do not compare yourself to others." Who can achieve that? Similar advice would be, "Do not notice that other people are beautiful. This will cause longing. Do not notice that the sun is warm. This will cause you to feel colder at night. Do not notice that sex feels good. This will cause you to want more of it." We can't help but compare ourselves to others, just as we can't help but judge each other and the various events of our lives. It is ridiculous to forbid or advise against such things. What the writer should have said is that comparing yourself to others, without a firm sense of self, may make you vain and bitter. So stick to your road. In time you may be like those greater people, and be passing the points they are now passing. And those lesser people may also advance at their own rate. You will only become vain and bitter if you demand immediate satisfaction and immediate gratification. That is, if you demand equality of achievement. It is not greater and lesser persons that threaten your stability, it is your own misconception of equality that does that. Vanity and bitterness are not caused by judging but by misjudging. Vanity and bitterness are caused by thinking you have a right to position and esteem and respect without earning them.

Now let us return to the advice about happiness. "Strive to be happy." Good advice? No. It isn't logical, much less moral. How would one go about striving to be happy? Happiness is not an action you can complete or a thought you can think or a thing you can buy or hold. Similar advice would be, "Strive for blueness!" How do I do that?—with my arms or legs? Do I will it with my left brain or my right brain, with my eyes open or shut? The only possible way you could strive for happiness is by remembering those things that made you happy in the past, and doing more of them. Is that good advice? Maybe for a saint. But what about for the guy who likes beer and porn more than anything else? Should he strive to do nothing but drink beer and look at porn? You can't strive for happiness, because happiness is not an achievement. It is an outcome of various actions, some of which can be called achievements and others which can't. Is drinking beer an achievement? If greater achievements make you happy, then yes, strive for greater achievements. If getting drunk and fat and molesting small animals makes you happy, then don't strive to be happy. Strive for self-control and new pursuits.

Which brings us to the final major hurdle to leap in destroying the fundamental theorem of modernity. I have shown that there can be no equality in the eyes of God, since it would be blasphemous to claim to look through the eyes of God, among many other reasons. But aren't all people of value? Aren't all

people glorious? Aren't all people created equal? Aren't all people of some worth? Shouldn't we try to see the best in people? All different questions, and I will get to them all.

Let us start with the least absolute formulations and work our way up. Shouldn't we try to see the best in people? Yes. Pollyanna makes her point well, and we should certainly assume that there is the potential for goodness in people. But we should not be blind to facts in front of us. Just because there are no bad people in an old Disney movie does not mean there are no bad people in the world. We never get to see Pollyanna meet Dick Cheney, so we only see one side of the argument. And seeing the best in people has nothing to do with people being equal. You would not have to try so hard to find the good in people if some people did not hide it so well.

Aren't all people of value? Yes. Of the same value? No. Are all people of some worth? Yes. Are all people of great worth? No. Some people are worth a lot to history, to themselves, and to those around them. Some are worth less. Some are worth very very little. And some could be said to have a negative value. Some people make everything and everyone around them worse. By the meaning of value and worth, they must have a negative value or worth. Once again I give you Dick Cheney. The man destroys, pollutes or murders everything he comes near. By any reckoning, he is far in the red.

In the same line, a famous song by Ray Stevens—still played at many devotional and spiritual events—tells us that, “Everything is beautiful, in its own way.” Another fantastic falsehood posing as inspiration. Is a tumor beautiful in its own way, Ray? How about a lake of radioactive waste? How about a forest destroyed by acid rain? How about a leg blown off by a landmine? How about a pelican floating a pool of crude oil? How about a field of dead soldiers, mowed down by friendly fire? Is that beautiful in its own way?

Aren't all people glorious, at least as spiritual beings? I answer this with another question: “How can we imagine all people are equal when some people are stupid enough to ask this question?” Is Ted Bundy glorious, as a spiritual being? I don't think I want to spend much time with anyone who says he is. They are likely to tell me all food is delicious, as spiritual food, and serve me rotten potatoes and cockroach pie. They are likely to tell me that necrophilia is glorious sex, as spiritual sex, and suggest we partake.

George Carlin commented on this in one of his last monologues. “Are all people special?” No, he said with some heat and much humor. The sentence is a contradiction. The person who says it simply doesn't understand what special means. Special means different, in a good way. Basically it is a synonym of “better.” So the sentence becomes, “All people are better than all other people.” It is like Garrison Keillor's joke about Minnesota, where all children are above average. The difference is, you don't have many people saying, in all seriousness, that everyone's child is above average. The contradiction has raised its head above ground. But you do have many normal people saying that all people are special. Apparently that sentence contains ideas that are just difficult enough to elude the full understanding of the modern person.

Aren't all people created equal? No. Anyone who asks this hasn't seen a lot of babies, or spent any time with toddlers. People are created as unequal as can be. Babies are born all sizes, with different levels of

health. Some are beautiful, some are homely, some are sickly, some cry all the time, some laugh most of the time. But more important than all these differences is the difference in intelligence. Human beings have a greater range of intelligence than any other animal. We know that our IQ's are higher than other animals, but it is rarely noticed that our IQ's are also broader. Take another animal with very great physical variation: the dog. The difference in breeds is astonishing, from Chihuahuas to Wolfhounds. But the range in intelligence is comparatively small. Golden Retrievers are much smarter than Irish Setters, but the IQ difference is small. It is difficult to assign an IQ to a dog, but if we do it, the range is something like 40-50. A 10-point range, possibly a bit more, who knows? But with humans you have a normal range of around 80 to over 200, and that is not including the mentally retarded. That is to say, there is more difference between a person with an IQ of 200 and a person with an IQ of 80 than between the person with an IQ of 80 and a dog.

The IQ scale isn't arithmetical, so we (probably) can't say that there is more difference between the smart person and the dumb one than between the dumb one and a rock. And the IQ scale isn't solidly understood or applied, so we can't say anything for certain. But we can say that the mental difference between people is vast, and that it is astonishing. All laws and rules and customs are necessary precisely because of this astonishing difference. People are not equal in any way. They are not even nearly equal. They are so unequal it defies comprehension. It is like nothing else in the animal kingdom. No other species shows anything like the mental variation that humans do. You can take all species of primates together and not find the variation we have. Not including us, you would have to take almost the entire class of Mammals to find the variation in intelligence we have within our species.

A critic will say, "That is all fine and good, and may even be true, but we don't judge worth by health or intelligence. Many intelligent people are worthless or harmful. What about your example of Dick Cheney? His IQ may not be 200, but it is fairly high. It is therefore possible to believe that people are very different intellectually, but nonetheless equal in a spiritual sense."

Well, critic, you had me until the last sentence. Yes, it is true that we do not judge worth by intelligence or beauty or health, so strictly as a matter of logic we could believe in the inequality of brains and bodies and the equality of spirits. We could, except all evidence is against it. We do not know what God thinks of the matter, but we do know what people have always thought, and when people attempt to value one another in a spiritual sense, they never find equality. The Dalai Lama is not considered special because of his IQ or beauty, he is considered special because he is a representative of some higher plane. But he *is* special; he is not equal. He was reincarnated as himself due to certain actions in past lives: this is what the Buddhists believe. Therefore his "holiness" consists of some mixture of his achievements, in past lives as well as this one.

Jesus is also unequal, as are all his saints. Christians used to believe that the holiness of Jesus was predestined, and therefore mainly unearned. He was not special because he did special works here on earth, he was special from the get-go. Many Christians still believe this. But some believe Jesus is special and unequal because he lived a better life than anyone else. They therefore judge people "spiritually" by the life they lead. It does not have to be an intellectual life, but it must be a good one.

People who don't believe in the holiness of Jesus or the Dalai Lama are not more likely to believe in spiritual equality, but less, since they don't believe in a spirit. If they are materialists of some sort, they must believe in qualities that can be seen and measured. No one who has ever seen or measured anything can believe in equality, since no two snowflakes are the same, much less two people. Variation is the rule of life, not equality.

Modern people tend to hold many beliefs at the same time. Putting the materialists aside for the moment, since they are a small minority, we can say that the bulk of modern people believe that all people are equal spiritually *and* they believe that people who live better lives, in a moral sense, are better. These two beliefs are impossible to reconcile, obviously, but many or most people seem to hold them both. The second belief is trotted out in church or other moral situations, where they are trying to convince someone, or themselves, to do the right thing. The first belief takes the fore whenever they are in the presence of someone who is they feel is superior to them, and they are feeling inferior. They use the first belief as a fallback position, a security blanket and thumb to suck until the "holier" person leaves and quits oppressing them.

Now, I think it is clear that the difference in people's lives is greater even than the difference in their intellects. This can be seen by materialists and spiritualists alike. One need not be religious to see that there are greater and lesser people. One need not use the words good and evil, or even good and bad. One need only notice the size, number, and quality of their accomplishments. Intellect often accompanies this difference, and causes it or magnifies it, but worth is not a matter of intelligence alone. It is not even a function of intelligence. One good Amish farmer is worth all the Senators in Washington, although he may not have the IQ of the least of them. The difference being that his work is necessary and well-done, while theirs is destructive, and done poorly. One good chef is worth ten phony New Haven academics, in that her job is useful and achieved with care, whereas theirs are useless or harmful, and achieved with malice or impudence.

No one really believes in an equality of souls, anymore than they believe in the equality of apples or the equality of pop music. What they assert when they claim to believe in equality is the hope that ignorant but well-intentioned people will not be punished too severely, in this life or in any afterlife, and in that at least they are probably right. They do not mean to exempt Ted Bundy or Dick Cheney from any justice or judgment, least of all their own. They only mean to exempt the vast middle section of the world, which is neither good nor bad, neither of great worth nor of no worth. This belief in equality is just to say that they will not look too closely at you if you do not look too closely at them.

That policy may avoid conflict, but it is otherwise useless. It is certainly no form of self-help, since those who have agreed not to look closely can hardly find any truth. Progress was never achieved, by person or society, by an avoidance of scrutiny. I might add to my list above the question, "Aren't all people potentially good?" Possibly. All people certainly have the potential for growth, but only on the condition they work to achieve it. Avoidance of scrutiny and judgment, and claiming equality of achievement by right, is not the path to any sort of success, spiritual or otherwise.

In this way, the self-help book, propelled by the fundamental theorem, is actually a grand contradiction. The modern person is told he or she will become enlightened by recognizing the specialness of all people. If you unwind this and put it into a vocabulary that hasn't been muddled, it means that if you agree to say that all other people are wonderful, they will say you are wonderful. Once everyone says this, conflict will end and you will be happy. Enlightenment consists of 1) the recognition of equal "wonder" status, which confers on you instant transcendence, and 2) happiness, which is a sort of cosmic prize for your new transcendence. Unfortunately, all this is no more than bollocks. First of all, this transcendence is just a word. Saying that people are all wonderful doesn't allow you to transcend anything, except sense or logic. Second, happiness will not be conferred by saying something that is untrue. And even if it were, happiness was never the same as enlightenment. No real leader or guru was ever shallow enough to claim that it was. Those who have read beyond the Oprah Book Club know that none of the sages of history were stupid enough to confuse happiness with enlightenment. Seeking this sort of vulgarized path to transcendence and happiness can only *prevent* enlightenment, since the refusal to make judgments can only lead to stasis or rot. If you are already wonderful, what need have you to study or practice? If you can achieve transcendence from the Oprah Book Club, what need have you to read the real books of history, or to study the knowledge of the past?

In closing, let me look at one last formulation of the problem. One of my exes, upon discovering my disbelief in equality (and my lack of universal esteem), said, "Most people just don't count for you, do they?" In order to add it to the list, we might rewrite it more generally as, "Do all people count, or count equally?" No, they don't count equally. If they counted equally, I would have to send Son of Sam and George Bush and Michelle Malkin an invitation to every gathering I have. I would have to include Joey Buttafuoco every time I eat out. But do they count? Of course they count, in some way. They count as a big check, a little check, or a fat red X. Do they count as an equal second in my prayers, as an equal hug in my dreams, as an equal high-five on the street? No, of course not. Do I want to have sex with them all, equally? Do I hope to see them at the pub, equally? Would I vote for them all, equally? Dive in the water to save them, equally fast? Recommend them to Zeus or the alien overlords, equally? Hope to crash on an island with them, equally? No. Am I unusual in this, or unusually cruel? No.

But let us admit that my exe meant more than that. She meant that a large percentage of people, not just a few Ted Bundys and Dick Cheneys, did not hold much interest for me, socially. There were few that didn't annoy me, even fewer that I respected. That is what she meant, and she was right. But it is less clear that this is a valid condemnation of me. Given that the vast majority of people now watch Oprah, read self-help books, or dabble in pastimes equally vapid and annoying, I can hardly be blamed for finding them annoying. If people will talk about canine shakras and Lindsay Lohan and Richard Gere and self-image workshops and nail sculptures and sharks in tanks and talking vaginas, they can hardly expect to be found fascinating. More than that, it is impossible to interest such people in real conversation. Any serious topic must fall flat; any real talent must be envied and frowned upon as insubordinate and impolite. Isaac Newton couldn't get a word in edgewise at the modern gathering.

Marco Polo would be sitting in the corner with a book or a map, waiting for the clock to strike twelve. Titian would retreat to the bedroom to play on the computer. I doubt that Van Cliburn is even asked for a song at the modern party. The revelers are too busy with the Tarot cards and the wet bar and the life of the Sims to bother with Debussy. Who needs Claude when they have Guitar Hero?

As a specific example of the new party, let me take you home with me. One of the biggest social events of the year here in Taos is called the Glam Trash Fashion Show. This show—now in its 8th year—is linked to an art show, but the fashion show is much more popular. Both shows showcase trash. The artworks must be made of garbage and the costumes must be made of garbage. Originally this had something to do with recycling and ecology, but for most viewers and participants that fact has long since been upstaged by the “avant garde” aspects of the thing. The makeshift catwalk (just a dirt path) is accompanied by a cohort of Bowery musicians, blating and splatting on various old trombones, trumpets, and sousaphones, each blower doing his best to look and sound like Tom Waits on a bad day. To add to the spectacle, the models take the show very seriously, each one sidling by with a haughty look, as if she thought herself the real cat’s meow. It is clear by looking in the eyes of all involved that they think themselves part of some magnificent Duchampian parade. They have the air of Picasso or Cocteau backstage at the Ballet Russes or of Dali at a Montparnasse cafe. There is an announcer, very sure of his hipness, dressed as either Beavis or Butthead, we aren’t sure, with the precise up-to-the-minute lazy lilt to his voice, trying to frenzify the motley crowd. “Isn’t this the coolest thing *ever*?!!” [actual quote]. Wild cheers. Amazingly, everyone in town is here, from child to grandma, and even more amazingly, they all seem genuinely entertained. So little happens in the modern town, in any given year, that people will now show up and cheer at a grass mowing or a beetle infestation.

But to be fair, it would require knowing a bit of history to take any offense at this show. The happy children can’t be blamed for smiling at all the colorful people, and most of the adults know no more than the children. The young people and beautiful people have turned out for the event, and even through the tattoos there is an energy and a beauty that exceeds an average day in the county. The problem I have with the event is that this is it, as far as Taos goes. This isn’t a one-day slumming-it. This is a true yardstick of the creative potential of the modern city, large or small. It isn’t a joke. It isn’t a farce, either. It might be funny and might be a farce, except that this truly is both the center and the high end of culture, here and everywhere else. Sure, they sell a few high-dollar realist paintings in Taos, and have a few nose-in-the-air shows with wine and cheese, but that is just commerce. *This* is art, in the eyes of the young and cool.



Garbage has been high art and high-dollar art since 1917, when Duchamp took it into the top museums. The children watching the show in Taos don't know that, so they are oblivious to the dark side. They are simply infected by the high spirits. But someone like me feels like Mr. Darcy at a Sex Pistols reunion, because I can see the show as a symptom of the malaise of an entire century. This is not about ecology or recycling any more than Duchamp's urinal was about plumbing. This is about the destruction of real art, and its replacement by vulgar creations. In the gallery, the beautiful painting has been replaced by the kindergarten construction; on the catwalk, la haute couture has been replaced by the hoop of styro-cups; along the verge the band has been replaced by a brass cacophony. This show isn't a light-hearted romp through the refuse pile, a childish kick through the autumn leaves; it is a smaller version of the Big Game: the big-city, high-stakes re-definition of art to suit the vulgar modern person. These local artists are not really selling the idea of recycling: they are Betsey Johnson wannabes, Andy Warhol wannabes. They know that J.D. Challenger and the other top-sellers of Taos may make good money, but that is nothing to what you can make with garbage art, once you make it to the big city. Nicolai Fechin is nothing to a Robert Rauschenberg, who got very very famous and very very rich by piling banal things on top of each other in little garbage piles.



As a matter of quality of execution or quality of conception, this local art and fashion is no worse, and may be better, than the art now being exhibited for hundreds of thousands (or millions) of dollars in New York City, LA, and London. *That* is why I cannot partake of the merriment. These models are not pretending to think themselves very important, they really do think it. This is not a farce or a joke, it is Modern Art, capital M capital A. The more downwardly mobile these artists and models appear to be, in dress and creation, the more upwardly mobile they are in the art world. The ceiling above me in the market is very low. The ceiling above them is vaulted like the Vatican. If they can hone their vulgarity a tiny bit more, and sleep with the right people, the sky is the limit. They really could be the next Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin, no joke.

Many of these Taos artists will not know what I am talking about; they will be fairly innocent participants; but that doesn't change anything. It is no accident that Glam Trash shows take place all over the Western World right now, and that they didn't take place 100 years ago. The young people of Taos may or may not know what they are doing, but the action had its planning and the action has its consequences. History is no accident, and Modernism is not just a local party.

Equality is the poison at the bottom of this cup, too. Modern art is not about equal rights or equal opportunity or *egalite*. It is about equality of achievement. It is the denial of talent, the denial of exceptional work, and the denial of beauty. It is the cooption of the gallery and the museum by those with average ability, or less-than-average ability. Since average work appeals to average people, popularity becomes the measure, not quality. But with the avant garde it is even worse than that. Modern art, at the highest levels, is not even of average quality: it is purposely sub-par, purposely ill-conceived, ill-constructed, and ill-intended. It is a pile of bricks or a empty white canvas or a stenciled word or a jar of snot. It must therefore bastardize its audience even further. Equality as the fundamental theorem allows it to do this, since people are pre-set to a downward mobility. They cannot achieve equality, so they slide toward inferiority. It is not hard to look like an artist in a gallery of mucus and broken blenders and squashed highway cones. Likewise, it is not hard to look good in a sea of tattooed people, a confused modern people trying valiantly to look their prepackaged worst. It is difficult to tell who is the cleverest or the most attractive in that crowd, the veils are so heavy. Veils of tattoos and grunge and alcohol and pot smoke and baggy pants and black make-up and hair dye. And that of course is the point. The fundamental theorem forbids winners, and the dress codes and social mores now prevent losers. If everyone looks and acts like a complete loser, then there is no bottom of the pile. The pile is a mile wide and an inch deep, like everything else these days.

But aren't people who believe in equality—or profess to—kinder people? Isn't it mean to believe in greater and lesser people, especially in this day and age? Bah! Stuff and nonsense. In my experience, when you strip off the varnish, people who talk equality are not kinder in any way. In fact, they are often far *less* kind. The fundamental theorem may be a hidden virus for a lot of normal people; but, especially in the arts, it is used as a powerful tool of usurpation, purposefully and with full knowledge of its unfairness and unkindness. In the arts, equality is the shibboleth or catch-phrase that clears the path. It removes truly talented people from the field by categorizing them as aristocrats or elitists, freeing up the market for the non-talented. It would be like removing all the tall and fast people from basketball, so that short slow people could co-opt the salaries and advertising dollars. This won't work in basketball, since people won't pay to see such a thing, but it has worked quite well in art, where no mass audience is required. In art, all that is required is that the critics and advertisers fool a few hundred well-placed rich people. These rich people cow and bribe another few thousand hangers-on, and the market is complete and self-propelled. But there is no kindness in it. Would it be a kindness or a fairness to steal basketball from LeBron James and Tim Duncan and give it to Danny Devito and Ricky Gervais, in the name of equality? Would it be a kindness to steal pole vaulting from Yelena Isinbayeva and Steven Hooker and give it to Kelly Osborne and Gary Coleman, in the name of equality?

Even outside art, equality is no sign of kindness. "Everyday people" use equality everyday just like those in the arts use it: to avoid competition with greater people. First they use it as a psychological tool, upon themselves and upon the unsuspecting "people-of-talent" around them. They say, "Well, so-and-so may be better than me at everything, but I have more compassion. I am a nicer person, since I don't beat people at things and make them feel small." This policy actually works a great deal of the time. Many people-of-talent (P-o-T) have been smothered with this manufactured guilt, and they soon

learn to succeed only in the closet. But equality is even more powerful as a tool of business than it is as a tool of psychology. What happened first in art has since migrated into a thousand fields of enterprise.

Even science has been polluted with equality. It is now considered immodest to question established science; to be “unequal” to the established opinion is *verboden*. Equality has killed freedom of thought. Science is more tightly controlled, from the middle out, than it has ever been, and the scientific method, which requires an open question, is all but dead. Peer review is usually seen as a logical way to jury, but it isn’t. To be juried by your peers is to be juried by your equals. But there are no equals, in science or anywhere else. Someone with a good idea has no peers, at least for the moment. He or she has the good idea and no one else has it. It is topsy-turvy to imagine that inferior thinkers can judge a superior thinker. The only jury that could hope to recognize good new ideas is a jury of the five greatest geniuses in the field. Every other jury is just going to be a wall, and even the five greatest geniuses may act as a wall. This is not just my opinion. Einstein also hated peer review. He simply stopped submitting to peer-reviewed journals. He couldn’t say, “Look, you fools aren’t my peers, so get out of my way.” Instead he was required to go around them, by publishing in books instead of journals.

The fundamental theorem is not a form of kindness or compassion, it is a form of what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*. Resentment. Envy. The veiled hatred of the second tier for the first. But it is no longer veiled. The attack upon talent in the arts could not be more clear or explicit. Exhibiting a can of excrement as art is not a subtle cue, is not a great puzzle. It should be clear by now that Modernism was never primarily a thumbing of the nose at rich people, though it may have been that, too. Modern art has been, fundamentally and categorically, a grand piss on talent and the talented, a century-long revenge of the non-talented upon Leonardo and Michelangelo and all the masters of history, as well as a current revenge on those alive now that can draw and paint and sculpt. Clement Greenberg, the greatest spokesman of Modernism, said it outright, mentioning Leonardo and Michelangelo by name. Duchamp said it, too, in print as well as with his mustache drawn on the *Mona Lisa* and other equally poignant pranks.

Is this a kindness? Is this a form of compassion? No, it is but another form of very bald propaganda. Hiding behind words like kindness and compassion and equality, the second tier, lusting after greater money and fame, co-opts field after field, beginning with art and ending who knows where. Don’t talk to me about kindness and compassion. The modern person has none of it. The Vandals and Visigoths likely had more true compassion than the Modern person. They certainly had less hypocrisy.

What a kindness it is indeed to see someone like Tracey Emin, looking like Marilyn Manson’s own bride, puking and puling to the camera, barely sober enough to speak, rich and famous from raping a field she stole from Titian and Rodin and Frida, talking about fairness and equality and democracy and progress. Yes, how truly blessed in our modernity we must feel, how grateful to the vagaries of history that we should live to be witness to Tracey Emin as artist. We could have been so unlucky and regressive and backwards as to have been alive for the unveiling of the *David* or the *Rokeby Venus* or the *Raft of the Meduse*, but no, we have been fortunate witness to the ultimate flowering of feminism and Plebeianism both, in the fantastic form of a bed littered with syringes and used condoms! How could we fail to feel the kindness and compassion of Modernism oozing from every soiled pillow and

sheet, the egalitarian warmth enwrapping us, the wholesome coddling of the eternal female sating us like mother's milk?



[With my disbelief in equality and my attack on Tracey Emin, most new readers will assume I am some sort of anti-feminist social Darwinist Republican. So this is the place to remind everyone I am a pro-feminist, pro-trade union, pro-ACLU, Earth First liberal, too far left to even vote Democrat (so I vote Green). I am a fan of Chomsky and Nader and Wendell Berry. I don't support market capitalism, though I am a big fan of the Constitution. I don't like big business and I usually come down on the side of the little guy or gal. I have to include a paragraph like this in many papers, since people can't get it through their heads that equality is not a left or right issue. Equal *opportunity* is a left or right issue, since it is the right that has historically dragged its feet there. But equality of achievement is a thing that is not necessarily linked to *any* real politics. It has nothing to do with democracy or republicanism or constitutional government or representational government or anything else. It would be pointless to deny that most equality of achievement talk now comes from the left, but attacking the left does not make me a rightist. It only makes me a rationalist, and there are damn few of those on either side.]

We hear a lot about kindness and fairness and compassion and progress, but I ask, "*Has justice been done?*" Have we passed a fair sentence, done a great good? In replacing Michelangelo with Tracey Emin, have we pleased any possible god? Can anyone but Tracey benefit? Yes, other equally disgusting people have benefited, but can feminism have benefited? Can the lower classes in the United Kingdom or anywhere else have benefited from her representing them and championing them? I don't see how. From a greater height, how can art history have benefited in any way from this "pluralism"? How was art in need of egalitarianism or equality or equal time? How has it benefited? We needed more women in the arts, yes, but we were going to get that anyway, without debasing art. Frida and Georgia did not require that we turn art into a cesspool to include them. Civilization has benefited greatly from equal opportunity, equal rights, equal pay, and so on, and by replacing Feudalism or tyranny with Republicanism, but how exactly has art benefited from exponential vulgarity, from its own destruction? That is the question that is never answered. *Cui bono?* Who benefits?

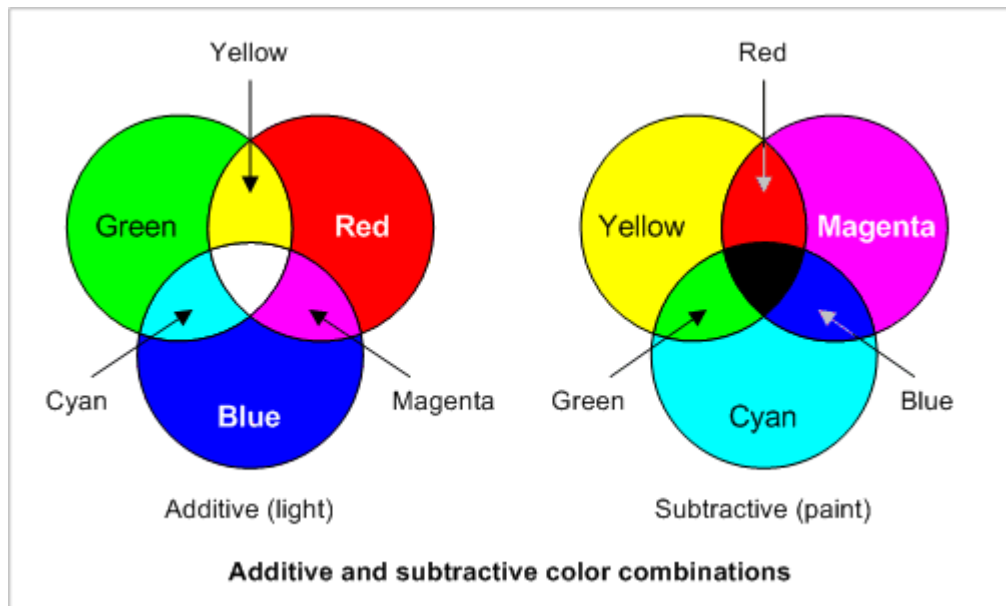
Modernism likes to link itself to equal opportunity and equal rights, but according to the logic of Modernism, the first tier has had no rights. It is not necessary to have any compassion for the first tier or to show them any kindness or regard or fairness. People-of-talent, like the proverbial white males, are the darlings of nature, were the darlings of the past. Therefore they may be slandered and ignored and squeezed out of existence, with no qualms. The program of Modern Art says these things outright, with no apologies. People-of-talent do not have to be treated fairly. They can be excised from all MFA programs, and their exclusion can be written into the syllabus, with no hedging. If they sneak in, they can be told to leave, right to their faces. Equal opportunity is a myth within art. P-o-T have no equal opportunity. Likewise with major galleries and exhibitions. MOMA and the Whitney and the Guggenheim and Saatchi Gallery and le Beaubourg could not have a clearer policy if they shot all people-of-talent on sight, from fortified turrets on the facades of their buildings.

In defense of this policy, these institutions simply sing “equality, progress, fairness, kindness” like a silly parrot. Pluralism is supposed to be all-inclusive, by the definition of the word “plural”. That includes everyone but people-of-talent. P-o-T are not welcome. They must drink at a different fountain and sit at the back of the bus. Literally. P-o-T have been forced to open their own art schools, since they cannot get into “normal” MFA programs. They cannot school with the rest or exhibit with the rest or sell with the rest or advertise with the rest.

And what has this century-long exclusion of the first tier achieved, politically and artistically? It has achieved the ascendance of Tracey Emin and Rachel Whiteread and the Chapman Brothers and Bruce Nauman and so on. It has provided us with cans of excrement and lotto tickets as art. It has turned our museums and galleries into junkyards and dumps and toilets. It has replaced the barn dance and the ball with the Glam Trash fashion show and the rave. The taffeta gown has been replaced by the studded brassiere and fishnets, the white collar and greatcoat replaced by the wife-beater and ripped jeans. The Louvre has given way to the Pompidou, Dickens and Austen have given way to the X-men and the Vagina Monologues, Milton and Dante have given way to Eckhart Tolle and Dr. Phil, *Walden* has given way to *Who Moved my Cheese?*, Beethoven and Carolan have given way to Britney and Snoop Dogg. These are the fruits of equality, the outcome of the search for happiness, the results of self-help and an all-embracing compassion. What progress we have made indeed with our new ideas.

An Art Experiment

by Miles Mathis



After several weeks of politics, it is time to return to art and science. Here is an art experiment you can do with me.

I have noticed a slight compartmentalization in my brain, concerning the way my eyes see color. I have not read of this particular specialization in any of my readings of brain function, so I thought I would let my readers supply me with the data to extend this finding beyond my own eyes.

In order to do this experiment, you need to be outside on a sunny day, in direct sunlight. You need some brightly colored objects, with colors that are as near to the primaries as possible. The paint-mixing primaries, not the photoshop primaries. Meaning, red, blue, yellow. Green also works well, so actually we can include the photoshop primaries, if we mean RGB and not CMYK. I discovered this phenomenon while lying on a brightly colored beach towel. For me it works best with blue and yellow.

Here is what I discovered. My left eye sees a richer blue and my right eye sees a richer yellow. There would appear to be more or better receptors for yellow in one eye, and for blue in the other. This makes the same red look more orange in my right eye and more purple in my left eye. And it makes the same green look yellower in my right eye and bluer in my left eye.

The difference is very slight, and I believe it would take an artist to notice it. I didn't notice it until I was older, which could mean one of two things. Either I wasn't as observant when I was younger, or the specialization hadn't yet become extreme enough to notice.

I am left-handed and left-eye dominant. For this reason, I might expect that right-handers would see blue better with the right eye. But we will have to see. These expectations don't always bear themselves out.

I have another interesting theory. Since the wiring is crossed in the brain, my right brain is receiving the information from my left hand and left visual hemisphere. This would mean that the visual information in my right brain is saturated bluer; and my left-brain, yellower. Now, the right brain specializes in many of the functions of art and creativity. Hence the famous book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. This is true both for left-handers and right-handers. It is thought that left-handers may have a more direct link to the right brain, but their brain maps are not reversed. The brain of a left-hander is, in most major ways, set up like a right-hander. Its chirality is the same. Other organization may vary, such as left/right links, or degree of asymmetry, but the major division is equivalent.

This means that, in some sense, my entire creative process is saturated blue. This could explain why I always correct my photographs toward the blue, why I use little yellow on my palette, why my entire artistic *oeuvre* is more blue than yellow, and even why I like Picasso's Blue Period.

If we find that my experience is like that of other left-handers, it could mean that color preference is tied to handedness. Perhaps all lefties skew their paintings toward blue and all righties toward yellow. Leonardo, a lefty, certainly tends to confirm my hypothesis. As does Picasso. Munch was left-handed. And Titian was right-handed. We would expect Jamie Wyeth to be right-handed, as he is, and I believe I remember that Dan Gerhartz is right-handed. Was Reynolds a righty and Gainsborough a lefty? I don't know, but it is an interesting question.

This would also have market consequences. If righties prefer warmer paintings, and righties make up 85 to 90% of the population, then this would tend to make it difficult for lefties. Only the fact that lefties tend to be more interested in art to start with begins to even it out a bit. Men are also more likely to be lefties, by at least 2 percentage points, but I am not sure that helps us. I would have to show that men shop for art more often than women and I cannot do that.

It is not just color that differentiates art by left-handers and right-handers. Lefties may, in many ways, look at the face as a reversed image, compared to righties. We all know that this would make a huge difference, if it were true. A face reversed is not the same face. It doesn't have the same expression or the same emotional content. This has been proven beyond a doubt by manipulated photographs and false composites. You can see it clearly just by taking scans of your paintings into photoshop and reversing them. The whole tone of the painting may change, especially if it contains a face.

Could it be that a righty sees one of my paintings like that? That he or she feels what I feel when I see the reversed image, rather than what I feel when I look at the correct image? I don't know. It is possible, and it might explain a lot.

Maybe I will post all my scans in reverse, with a yellow cast, and see if my sales go up.

My 100 Favorite FILMS



by Miles Mathis

2009, updated heavily 2022

[In re-editing this list in 2022, I realized something: I really don't like Hollywood. Which I guess is why my list will seem so odd to most people. There are no Tarantino movies here, no Scorsese movies, and only one Coppola movie. No Eastwood movies, no John Wayne movies, no Brando movies, no westerns, no mob movies. I scratched *Sophie's Choice* from my original list because it is Holocaust propaganda, but reinserted it near the end strictly for Streep's performance, which is worth seeing. I deleted many others for the same reason, including *Lawrence of Arabia*. I also deleted some that I realized I had included because they were famous, rather than because I actually liked them. I believe I only added two that came out after my original list: *Jane Eyre* and *The Hangover*. I also added *RED*, but that was from 2008. I tried to fill in all the new open spots, but couldn't do it. There are some additions however: a few I forgot the first time, such as *The Secret of Roan Inish*. The comments below now don't make full sense, since I have moved things around, but I leave them up as a nod to history.]

This list was much easier to compile than the songs list. Honestly, it was difficult for me to get the list to 100. My first list only went to about 75, and I had to search to round out the list. I suppose this is

because it is much more difficult to make a great movie than it is to make a great song. A popular song is under 3 minutes, normally, and you just need one good hook and a nice voice. Of course there is a lot of competition, since many people have nice voices and many can find a melody, but a good song isn't that rare. A great song, yes, but as I said, there are thousands of good songs. With films, though, we are in a different world. Films can fail for so many reasons, and they usually do. Like most contemporary people I am a real fan of cinema, but I am also very finicky. I am annoyed easily and impressed with difficulty. Actors and directors tend to annoy me by their very nature, so I do not suspend disbelief as quickly as most. In addition, I think we are in a peculiar place with film, historically: the medium was really in its infancy until a few decades ago, then after a short period of relative comfort we entered a stage of experimentation and novelty. Growth was very fast—I would say too fast—and we went straight from gothic to rococo, skipping a classical period almost entirely. The golden age, if we can call it that, lasted less than two decades, and by the 80s film was already becoming mannered and corrupt, self-referential and self-deconstructing. What it took painting and sculpture and poetry and literature five centuries to accomplish, film accomplished in about five decades. For this reason, I suspect film may enter a second round, and we may see a second golden age in the near future, once the phonies tire of novelty, misdirection, and CGI.

We can see this clearly with the *Star Wars* series. The first two *Star Wars* make my list, and this is because they were made in the late 70s, toward the end of a period I am calling the first golden age of cinema. This period started in the early 60s, when color was fully realized, when acting began to be more natural, and when all the lessons from decades of failures and partial successes had more or less been absorbed. By the end of this period, special effects had also been mastered: they were convincing without being intrusive. *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Alien* are both right on the cusp, being examples of effects just right but not too much. After that, it was always too much, and the effects began to outstrip the scripts and the dialog. *The Return of the Jedi* was already a lazy script with lazy acting, and it is because the director knew the effects were carrying the ball. By the time we reached *The Phantom Menace*, CGI had gotten into everybody's heads (George Lucas' first of all) and planted a vermin egg. Scripts, casting, acting, and directing all took a nosedive, and they are still diving. The LOTR trilogy, the Batman series, the Terminator series, the Spiderman series, the Ironman series, and all the rest are just a continuation and extension of George Lucas' bad re-prioritizing of cinema, and we are all slogging through this cultural nightmare, caused by a bad meal before bed. That meal is a meal of false technology. *The Revenge of the Sith* was the worst of the six installments, despite having the most advanced effects, and it is because the directors and producers and writers dropped the ball on everything but the effects. Hayden Christiansen and Natalie Portman are even worse actors than Ewan McGregor (if that is possible), and the rest of the film is forced to devolve to their level. Even Yoda has lost all his charm. By the time we reached *The Phantom Menace*, Yoda had gone from being a cute little Muppet with a sense of humor to a CGI asshole with scary eyes and a fake gravity. In that film, both Yoda and Samuel L. Jackson are directed to manufacture the appearance of wisdom by being sour, quarrelsome and insulting. Compare that to Alec Guinness' demeanor in *Star Wars* or Yoda's demeanor in *Empire*. When and why did Lucas decide that wisdom was humorless and self-aggrandizing? Did CGI literally suck all the humanity out of him, like mynox sucking on a power cable?

But enough of that. Beyond my aversion for CGI, this list is very different than most you have seen or will see. I give no credit for historical significance. This is a straight list of what I consider to be the best movies, and the old movies have to compete on equal footing with new movies. Another way to look at it is to judge from a great distance in time, as if you are looking back hundreds of years. From a distance, no one will care which director was first to use some trick, or which actor was famous at the time. Most film lists are made by critics, and critics want to prove how smart they are to you and to each other. They would not think to leave off the required old movies, for this reason. I have quite a few old movies on my list, but it is because I really like them, not because they are famous with critics or intellectuals.

By the same token, I feel free to leave off newer movies that I don't really like, such as *Pulp Fiction*. I bury *The Godfather* down at #65 because the subject matter doesn't impress me as much as it does most people; the acting doesn't impress me either, apart from its use to the movie. If I am not impressed by the movie as a whole, I consider the acting to be in vain. For the same reason I left doctors' shows and lawyers' shows off my TV list (I cannot suspend disbelief far enough to believe that doctors or lawyers are fascinating people), I also leave mob movies off or well down my list. I don't find anything even potentially poignant, sexy, or thrilling about the mob. You might as well try to convince me that I can gain insights about life or be entertained by watching cockroaches suck on each other's brains.

Beyond that, I think this list is heavily influenced by an artist's eye, and I have made no effort to apologize for it or tone it down. I judge by the only criteria I can judge by: my own. I admit this gives the list a peculiar look, at first glance. It doesn't read like a committee list or a critic list, but it also doesn't read like a man's list or a woman's list. It doesn't have nearly enough action flicks to be mistaken for a *GQ* list, or enough romances to be mistaken for an *Oprah* list. The heavy population of period pieces at the beginning would lead some to question my testosterone levels, but then they will remind themselves that I am a realist artist (an odd beast in today's menagerie), and it will all begin to make sense again.

As you see, Woody Allen dominates the list, appearing five times, including number 1. I have little doubt that Woody will be seen as the greatest screenwriter and director of our time, and that this will become clearer as the years pass. He is battling two things right now that will not last: 1) His age. It is hard to watch people get old, especially on screen. 2) His scandalous remarriage. Future decades and centuries will not care nearly as much as we do what he did in bed. Once he is as dead as Bogart and Orson Welles and the rest, the critics can start judging his movies on an even footing with *Citizen Kane* and *Casablanca* and so on. He will do just fine.

Merchant/Ivory will also do just fine, since they have created some of the greatest masterpieces of the last half-century. I give them four places on my list, including three in the top 20. If they hadn't become enamored of Nick Nolte in the mid-90s, they might have done even better.

Roman Polanski also takes four places on my list, with the highest going to *The Pianist*. I purposely put *The Pianist* above *Schindler's List*, since it better avoids propaganda and sensationalism. And I put it above *Chinatown* because it is a more important film. Polanski's only problem in getting more people to agree with me on both these points is timing. If he had come out with *The Pianist* ten or twenty years earlier, people would have judged *Schindler's List* by it, instead of the reverse. As it is, they have judged *The Pianist* against the reputation of *Schindler's List*, instead of against the film itself. And as with Woody Allen, everything Polanski has done has been tainted by his own personal story.

Although I include Scorsese on my list for *Taxi Driver*, I consider Polanski to be a much better director. Compare their period pieces, for a start. *The Age of Innocence* is flat and boring compared to *Tess* or *Oliver Twist* or *MacBeth*. Scorsese is the only director who has managed to get a bad performance out of Daniel Day Lewis, not once, but twice. *Gangs of New York* is one of the worst movies ever made, and Scorsese pushes Day Lewis too far in trying to save it. And poor DiCaprio. Next to Daniel Day Lewis, he looks like Kevin Costner trying to out-act Morgan Freeman in *Robin Hood*. A complete disaster, in other words. Polanski is better at modern movies, too. *Chinatown* is much superior to *Goodfellas* or *Cape Fear* or *Raging Bull*. DeNiro saves Scorsese's ass over and over, and without him the flaws of these films would be much more obvious. The same can be said of *Taxi Driver*, which, without DeNiro, would never work. Yes, Nicholson is great in *Chinatown*, but he doesn't need to act over the top of plot holes like DeNiro does. Who but DeNiro could make a hero out of Travis Bickle?

Stanley Kubrick makes the list three times, with *Barry Lyndon* ranking the highest. Although he was a great director, I consider him to be generally overrated. *Eyes Wide Shut* was a disaster, and *Lolita*, although interesting, was also a failure. If anyone, Kubrick should have had the guts to follow Nabokov and cast a girl as Lo, instead of a woman. Once you refuse to cast a young teen as Lo, you have destroyed the entire plot and all the commentary, and you might as well make a different movie. Which is basically what he did. Kubrick's long suit was not humor, either, and *Dr. Strangelove* is not nearly as funny as most people seem to think it is. Peter Sellers could make a funeral funny, and he often has to do that for Kubrick. Even in *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick made mistakes that were nearly fatal. Ryan O'Neal is way out of his depth, and only Kubrick's direction saves him from ruining the whole thing (mostly). Yes, Polanski made a very similar casting mistake with Kinski in *Tess*, but Kinski's looks were more astonishing than O'Neal's. O'Neal was handsome, but Kinski was awe-inspiring. It requires awe to cause an audience to overlook accent problems like those two both had. Kinski's eyes could hypnotize you (making you believe that a girl from Evershot could have a German accent), but O'Neal could not do the same.

Some will say, "If this is supposed to be an artist's list, why isn't Tarkovsky or someone like that at the top? How can *Caddyshack* rank above *Andrei Rublev*?" While that is a good question, I have an answer. This list isn't just for cinematography or artistic composition. If it were, then yes, Tarkovsky would be hogging all the top spots. The only other films that compete with *Andrei Rublev* in that regard are other Tarkovsky films, like *Nostalghia*, for instance. No one came close to Tarkovsky in the art film category, not even Kubrick. *Barry Lyndon* would have to move way up my list, but it still wouldn't compete with

Tarkovsky. Polanski's *Tess* would move up, but the same applies. That said, Tarkovsky was weak on story, to say the least. His stories were created mostly to give him a way to tie all his shots together. Tarkovsky was not so much telling a story as creating a mood. Sometimes that is exactly what I want from a film, but most times I prefer a story. Good storytelling is not easy, and the other writers and directors deserve credit for story even though they usually can't compose scenes like Tarkovsky. It would be great to see a director that could do both, but so far that hasn't happened. Kubrick made some effort to do it with *Barry Lyndon*, and Merchant/Ivory tried as well, both with a large degree of success. But nothing on the level of Tarkovsky, as I think most will admit.

Despite my love for serious cinema, my list is not one-dimensional. It is well-seasoned with comedies, science fiction, and animation. You will not see many lists where *Caddyshack* breaks the top 50, or where *Lady and the Tramp* makes the top 80. For that matter, who else who has been called a snob would dare to put *Pollyanna* above *The Seven Samurai* or *Lawrence of Arabia*? As I said, this is my list, and I boldly defend such eccentricity. I would rather watch *Pollyanna* a tenth time than either of those masterpieces, and that fact is a large part of what this list is about.

I decided to include miniseries and made-for-TV movies along with the rest. Some might say that miniseries have an unfair advantage, but if that were true most lists would be heavy with them. They are said by some to have an unfair advantage because they have more time to work with. That argument fails because more time just gives the director and actors more chances to fail. In fact, most miniseries do fail on that score, and it is not only because they normally must make do with lesser actors and directors. The two miniseries that made my list come in very high, but they are also very rare. Both are not only one level above most miniseries, they are two or three levels above them. They have managed to do what Merchant/Ivory have done, on a much larger scale. For that reason they are due all praise they have received, and are due the ranking I give them here.

I have moved *Heaven Can Wait* up to the top, as you see. I saw it again in 2023 and it has not only aged well, it just keeps getting better. It is difficult for me to understand why it doesn't rank very high in common weblists. The only thing I can figure is that Beatty must have pissed some people off after his peak around the time of *Reds*, and that they now refuse to promote him. Everything in life, and especially on the internet, is rigged, and this is just more proof of it.

1. *Heaven Can Wait* (1978)
2. *Room with a View*
3. *Hannah and her Sisters*
4. *Sense and Sensibility*
5. *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC 1995)
6. *Casablanca*
7. *Tous les Matins du Monde*
8. *Howard's End*
9. *Breaking Away*

10. Andrei Rublev
11. Barry Lyndon
12. Wives and Daughters (BBC 1999)
13. The Black Stallion
14. Poltergeist
15. The Remains of the Day
16. A Feast of July
17. The Secret Garden (1993)
18. Romeo and Juliet (1968)
19. Othello (1995)
20. The Empire Strikes Back
21. Crimes and Misdemeanors
22. Alien
23. Pollyanna
24. Jane Eyre (2011)
25. Star Wars
26. Manhattan
27. Ethan Frome
28. Tie: Fright Night (1985), Fright Night (2011)
29. I, Claudius
30. The Secret of Roan Inish
31. Fletch
32. The Sound of Music
33. Splendor in the Grass
34. Annie Hall
35. Groundhog Day
36. Bullets over Broadway
37. The Mission
38. Fly Away Home
39. Out of Africa
40. Blade Runner
41. Leon (the Professional)
42. Raiders of the Lost Ark
43. Anne of the Thousand Days
44. Diner
45. The Graduate
46. Watership Down
47. Jaws
48. Monty Python and the Holy Grail
49. Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon
50. Caddyshack

51. Something about Mary
52. Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)
53. Planet of the Apes (1967)
54. The Wizard of Oz
55. Rear Window
56. Ghostbusters
57. I Married a Witch
58. Tess (1980)
59. Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
60. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid
61. Love and Death
62. Big
63. To Catch a Thief
64. Little Big Man
65. Ghostbusters II
66. 2001 A Space Odyssey
67. A Man for All Seasons
68. Return of the Jedi
69. Play it Again, Sam
70. Splash
71. School of Rock
72. Halloween
73. The Grapes of Wrath
74. 12 Angry Men
75. Lady and the Tramp
76. Be Kind Rewind
77. The Parent Trap (1960)
78. High Fidelity
79. Deconstructing Harry
80. The Mayor of Casterbridge
81. Cyrano de Bergerac (1990)
82. Adaptation
83. Aliens
84. It's a Wonderful Life
85. Anchorman 2
86. RED
87. Definitely Maybe
88. Lilith
89. Amadeus
90. North by Northwest
91. The Hangover

92. The Breakfast Club
93. Chinatown
94. Ferris Bueller's Day Off
95. Little Women (1994)
96. Sophie's Choice
97. Brazil
98. Washington Square
99. American Graffiti
100. The Outsiders

Fired by ARC

by Miles Mathis



Fred Ross

I have been asked by many readers why no new columns have appeared in the last two months in my opinion series at ARC. Am I ill? On vacation? No, I am not. I have been fired.

The firing was precipitated by the second part of my article titled *Choosing a Subject: the Nude*. The article was intended to go into my opinion series, a series proposed by Fred Ross, the editor of ARC. About a year ago now (Feb. 2004) Fred invited me to write a weekly column for ARC, saying that I could write about anything that came to mind as long as it had to do with art. This changed a few months into the series when I claimed in an article that the artist was the best judge of art (not the *only* judge, but the best judge). Fred decided to add a disclaimer to my series, to make it clear that my opinions were my own and did not express the views of ARC in all cases. I thought this was somewhat redundant, in that the series was an *opinion* series: no one would expect that two people, no matter how closely allied, would agree on everything. However, I agreed to the disclaimer, choosing to see it simply as another advertisement in my favor. Here was further proof that I was "a loose cannon, a dangerous man." These things, as silly as they are, are usually good for PR, not the reverse.

The tension was increased a couple of months later when I submitted my review of Roger Kimball's *The Rape of the Masters*. I wasn't sure how much criticism of the right Fred would allow on ARC. He and I had not discussed politics and I really didn't know how he would react. I thought there might be a chance he would let it pass, if only in order to broaden the range of discussion on ARC. As

it turns out I was wrong. He took violent exception to several paragraphs and refused it with contempt, telling me he didn't have time to read such things. Although I was a little surprised by his manner, I did not take the his refusal of the review personally; I accepted it as part of an author/journal relationship. No journal is going to publish everything you write, no matter who you are.

Fred did not take it so casually, however. He had taken personal offense at my politics and was now on high alert. I had been used to having only small editing of my articles, or none, but my next assigned article—on George Washington University [*Groundhog Day...*—came back to me with extensive editing and deletions (as well as additions—sentences that I didn't write being inserted at will). I simply un-submitted it and returned to my opinion series, hoping that the bad blood would cool.

But it did not cool. My article on nudity, although nowhere near as political as my Kimball review, touched a nerve, or several nerves. I was told that my submissions would no longer be read unless I agreed to conform strictly to ARC philosophy. I must begin to pre-edit myself and not waste Fred's time by making him read things he did not agree with. He said this outright, almost in those words. Specifically, I must not 1) mention van Gogh again, except to criticize. I could not quote or use him as a positive example or say that I liked any of his paintings. One reference to him had already been edited out of my MoMA article and a second reference was kept in only because I fought for it. I had quoted van Gogh often in my opinion series, since I find van Gogh's *Letters* to be one of the most important and inspiring set of documents in history. I now learned that each of these quotes had been like an arrow to Fred's heart. There would be no more arrows. 2) I must not praise Munch, or any art like his, which also went against ARC philosophy. I am still not sure why Munch is anathema, but I decided not to ask. If Fred doesn't like him, he can leave him out of his favorites list without insulting me one iota. But I don't see why I should edit my own list to suit anyone's agenda. It would be one thing to state that Munch was superior to Bouguereau and had superseded him and all like him, as the moderns are wont to do. But I had done no such thing. I had simply mentioned a Munch painting in passing as an example. It was clear that I found the painting [*Puberty*] interesting, but I made no commentary on its technique or its relative value. I can't see that editing myself of such examples can make my articles more interesting or informative. And I also can't see that Munch is any special danger to the values of ARC or any other sane person or entity. Besides which I was not and would never set up Munch as the pinnacle of art or as the ultimate psychology for the artist. I simply like some of his paintings. I believe his technique and his mood are sometimes in perfect harmony; and that mood, though gloomy or even neurotic, is never nihilistic. For me, this makes it different in kind than the mood of Freud or Nerdrum, for example. 3) I was not to criticize the Bush administration, not even on specific issues of public policy in art. This is the only message I could glean from Fred's reaction to my sentence or two concerning Ashcroft's draping of classical public sculpture in Washington, DC. This reaction very much surprised me, since half of ARC's museum could be draped if it fell under the same policy. I was told that ARC could not afford to offend or alienate its major readers (whoever they are). I had thought that ARC was created to tell the truth, but I have always been naive in that way. I cannot imagine that ARC's right-leaning readers would be in favor of draping classical sculptures, or pretending that it was not happening. If they were offended by all nudity, they

would be offended by Bouguereau and ARC, and would not be readers. But this sort of logic is not available to all, I know.

So here I am, back in the seclusion I so richly praise at the end of my last article. I have to say that it suits me. For I have the distinct feeling that it will look good on my resume, in the very long term, to have been fired by ARC. An even cleverer man than I might have joined ARC under a cloak, for the very purpose of getting fired.

PS. Fred will argue that he never used the word fired. This is true. He made demands that no independent writer would ever consent to, knowing that I would not consent to them. The line between that and firing is very fine, and might be called infinitesimal.

PPS. *Nota bene* that I never use the word "censored" here or elsewhere in my relations with ARC. Fred never published anything over my protest, changed any word without my consent, or played dirty in any way. For quite a long time ARC published my articles exactly as I wrote them, and I am grateful for this opportunity--an opportunity few writers ever have, even for a short time. ARC has the right to its agenda, including the right to edit as they see fit. Fred should have precisely the sort of website he envisions. I would never argue against this right, as a right. I have not used the word "censor" since a writer never has any unalienable right to be printed. My argument is not that my freedom has been suppressed, but that ARC's vision is overly narrow and that its editorial policies are not in its own best interest, much less the interest of art history. Good writers will not submit to being the mouthpiece of an ideology. A person with interesting ideas will never be strictly yoked to the ideas of another person. Alliances can only be general alliances: a writer and his editor can never agree on every last term, down to who would be the best person to quote in every paragraph. And no writer will ever allow an editor to insert sentences into a completed article. That is writing by committee, and is only appropriate when both authors are signing the article (or when the piece is a strict editorial, prepared by a board and unsigned by any individual). Furthermore, no writer with any self-respect will write for an autocratic editor, one who treats him with condescension. A man must differentiate between his friends and his enemies, and treat them accordingly. In swimming upstream, Fred has become used to dealing more with enemies. I can understand this—99% of my time in the arts is spent in some posture of self-defense. But if a person does not remember how to change poses quickly, all his acquaintances quickly devolve into enemies or flunkies. People in positions of power are especially prone to this, and people who attain positions of power coming from the margins are doubly prone. Fred and ARC may be able to avoid this crisis. I wish them well, for a majority of their attacks on the left are factually correct and sometimes well presented. The ARC museum is a benefit to the web and the promotion of traditional education is long overdue. However, turning a blind eye to the problems on the right cannot benefit art. Art must be defended from all encroachments, left and right.

Furthermore, tearing down the avant garde to erect an ersatz version of the Victorian Royal Academy is both untenable and undesirable. The 20th century yielded few useful lessons to the real

artist, but one useful lesson is that rigid standardization, though useful to some mid-level talents, is a waste of time to the most talented. The absolute chaos of the 20th century, and its near-complete loss of technical knowledge, is just one way of getting it wrong. The other is to require that all art students copy casts for years before they are allowed to do anything creative. The life of van Gogh is perhaps the ultimate proof of this. But one can also look to artists as diverse as Michelangelo, van Dyck, Rembrandt and Sargent, none of whom came from an "academic" training. Michelangelo and the rest were all trained by Masters, but for various reasons they progressed quickly, skipped many steps, and arrived at the ends of their apprenticeships without ever doing much basic training. Sargent is considered to be the antithesis of van Gogh, but he did little more cast work than Vincent. He wasted some time in the Ecole, but most of his progress was made with Carolus-Duran. And even there the progress was mostly passive. Carolus-Duran did precious little real teaching. Sargent could have made the same progress, almost as fast, copying Carolus-Duran at the Louvre.

The point of all this is that ARC threatens to devolve into the voice of mediocrity. It threatens to be the champion of the new art wonk--the artist consumed with technique and finish—as well as of the critic who cannot differentiate between style and content. Almost without exception, the new realist is an artist who is obsessed with methodology, one who can discuss nuts and bolts *ad infinitum* but who has no ideas or subjects worth presenting. The new realist looks at the paint even before the painting; he has no idea that a painting may represent a mood or an emotion. The subject matter of this realism is almost always either a still-life composition (even if it include figures), or a clever demi-surrealism, with figures rearranged in photoshop before they are pounced onto the canvas. The still-life artists have an uncanny knack for draining all the emotion and character out of their subjects, and one must conclude that it is done purposely, either to look more contemporary, or to fit into the abstract nature of the composition. These artists are not painting the figure to reveal individual character, they are using the figure as a device to balance the left side of the canvas, or to provide a mannequin for the pretty shawl they have found. The demi-surrealists are also not to be found treating the figure as the representation of an individual, one with real thoughts and emotions; they use the figure as a clever metaphysical or psychological device, as a representation of an idea. In the first camp you have William Whitaker and Claudio Bravo and David Leffel and Richard Schmid and Nelson Shanks (as well as the true still-lifers like Daniel Sprick); in the second you have Will Wilson and Dino Valls and Odd Nerdrum.

ARC is on the conservative side of this conservative dichotomy. The demi-surrealists are a bit scary sometimes. They can also be politically progressive, or seem so. ARC is therefore the haven of the still-life (or stunted life) artists. For these artists the mannequin is the central and strongest personality in the stuido. They brag about not using photographs, apparently unaware that a photograph of a mannequin would not be a great loss of artistic content.

Understand that I am not coming down on the side of the demi-surrealists. I find both roads pointless. A painting dominated by design might as well devolve into a Rothko or a Johns--it is not a great argument against the avant garde. But a painting dominated by clever ideas or poses or juxtapositions or riffs is also not an appealing alternative to the idea-inebriated work of Modernism. If

I were impressed by cleverness as cleverness I might as well be a shock artist and be done with it. Steven Assael has gone a piece down this road: painting the freaks is not a long stone's throw from gouging out the eyes of donkeys, like Dali, or putting sharks in tanks, like Damien Hirst. The tattooed people are interesting as physical subjects to precisely the same depth as corpses in formaldehyde.

But I am forgetting that this digression is part of a post postscript. If you want to read more of my opinions on subject matter within new realism you will have to wait for an upcoming article devoted to just that.

A Letter from the Front

by Miles Mathis



For the last thirty years, men have been blessed with an ever-increasing supply of advice from women on how we should adapt to the new world of gender equity. All the media and every institution have been at the service of the re-education of men. That this re-education has been necessary I do not question. No sane person would argue against the proposition that much change was past due and that much has been for the better. On the other hand, most women would not argue with my assertion that much current advice from women to men is contradictory or just plain silly. The solving of any great problem requires many theories, only a few of which will ultimately be tenable, and it is no great surprise that we have had to wade through some fairly turbid waters.

What I question here is the problem of the re-education of *women*. The dialogue has been almost completely one-sided up to now, men being allowed to add only silent embarrassment and a dull acquiescence (that or ostracism from "good" society). Men have been left an opinion page on sexual matters only in *Playboy*, and this is easily dismissed. Disbelievers in current ideology, whatever it may be, are banished to the far right, whether they belong there or not, and their sexual privileges are revoked. Men cannot even defend themselves without inciting further unrest, and without the mouth of Camille Paglia, one assumes we would be toothless.

Women are left to re-educate themselves, with no input from men. This isolationism has encouraged a kind of reverse sexism, and many women now allow themselves a prejudice against men, an overt attitude of superiority that would never be accepted from the new man. A major societal problem, one concerning both sexes, is being left to one sex only; and this situation is yet regarded as an advance in fairness. As if there are no good men, and nothing good to be expected from men. But if this is the case, as some women apparently believe, then there is no solution, and all argument is pointless. The case will ultimately be decided by arm-wrestling or pistols at dawn, and all is lost even for the winner.

I grew up in the seventies in a household that was thoroughly feminist. When I was fourteen I gave up my room to a visiting Frances (Sissy) Farenthold, the first woman to be nominated for Vice-President. Five years later my mother ran for US Congress. So I found it both logical and desirable that women should be equal. Not only politically equal, but equal *to me*. I have always been attracted to intelligent women. I have had several long-term relationships that were good and sometimes very good. I have yet to experience a backlash against my upbringing, although I sometimes consider that my experiences in the last five years would excuse one. I mention my past, my childhood experiences and expectations, because I expect most women will not want to hear what I am about to say, and I want to make it a little harder for them not to listen. Most, I predict, will invent a history or a personality for me to explain my stubbornness. That they do not know me at all or that they have no evidence but my opinion on this one subject to support such a blanket dismissal will not hinder them, I know. They will not care that I have supported Dave Foreman and Earth First, that I consider Noam Chomsky and Ralph Nader and Faye Wattleton and Wendell Berry heroes, that I am not for GATT or NAFTA or any other economic growth, that I help frogs to cross the street. I will nonetheless be considered as one with Jesse Helms and Dinesh D'souza. I am either friend or foe, and no friend would dare to argue with them about the sins of patriarchy or the future of sexual relations.

This, in short, is my call: for anyone with any expectations at all, the dating scene (for lack of a better word) is a shambles. I can hear the reaction now: "We try to change the world, and all you can talk about is the 'dating scene.'" *True, I talk of dreams, which are the children of an idle brain.* You dream of equal pay for equal work, I dream of an evening with an agreeable woman (knowing I will not be allowed that word "agreeable," I use it anyway). But surely a large part of this revolution, for you, is the desire for a more *agreeable* man: a man with whom you may have a better life than you were allowed before. If not, if all this is truly only a material or political issue, I'm not sure I want your "changed" world. It sounds all too familiar.

I claim that for all men and women with blood in their veins, the new sexual politics has chilled the air. I claim that this is important, for men *and* women. And not just for those over thirty—for whom it has always been more difficult—but equally for those in their twenties or teens. Young women have been traumatized, most not by men but by the milieu. And the more intelligent, the more sensitive they are, the more they have suffered. Despite all the talk of equality, young women have not been given much help in defining a positive equal role with a man. And I don't mean in a business relationship, or

in the public arena, but privately, where it effects us all the most. We have been taught how to fight, but not how to get along. The self-respecting young woman who will not be submissive thinks she must be dominant, and so she cannot get along with any but the most sheepish men—men who do not interest her for long.

The problem begins early and is pervasive. Its sources are varied, but some are easier to isolate and gloss. Sex education is either non-existent, clinical, or designed primarily to discourage pregnancy and disease: information is skewed heavily toward the negative, and is more akin to propaganda than to proper preparation for being a sexual member of society. Sexuality is equated to drug abuse, and surely nobody has missed the parallels between the two "just say no" campaigns. The AIDS scare has been used to full effect in our high schools. Young men, with their daily doses of testosterone which repeat "just say yes," are often able to overcome such puritanism. But young women tend to stay confused much longer from the mixed and spurious information they receive. Their first few relationships may be ruined by their fears and coldness, they build walls to protect themselves from more such pain and loss, the situation snowballs, and many never recover. We are, in effect, raising a generation of sexual neurotics, and we are not nearly so far away as we think from the Victorian attitudes of a century ago.

To battle teen pregnancy and disease, we preach the same sermon to all, sacrificing the good with the bad. To prevent a certain percentage of sexual mistakes, we stigmatize all sexual action. But we do not explain how something that is wrong when you are 17 can be right when you are 18 (or 25, or married, or what have you). And if teens are often irresponsible (which they are), what of those in their 20's or 30's? How many truly responsible people do you know, of any age? Isn't all sex dangerous, rife with consequences? The same arguments for abolishing teen sex can be made for sex among 20-somethings, for all sex. And these arguments, though usually more subtle, *are* being made. It is felt by many that sex is just too risky, at any age, physically and emotionally. It is better to pass. A *just say no* attitude is hard to break. We inherited the belief that it is better to do nothing than to risk an error from Judeo-Christianity, and it inhibits us still.

Of course sex between teens still happens among the most adventuresome, but "good girls" are less likely to become sexual in high school, even with steady boyfriends, than they were ten years ago, or twenty years ago, and they are more likely to consider themselves better for it. The societal pressure that determines this situation effects everyone, both those having sex and those not having sex. Those who refrain from sex until college, or worse, marriage, often become sexual anorexics: having suppressed a natural appetite for 5-10 years, they find desire may be permanently stunted. Or they may find that redirected or misdirected sexual energy has created neuroses that are not easily dislodged. Those who do have sex as teenagers are rarely allowed to feel good about it. For these there is the danger that sex will become attractive not because it is good but because it is "wicked." There is a large contingency of the sexually active who now prefer to snarl at each other rather than smile, who find great pleasure in many kinds of pain. A childhood where natural desire is defined as sinful develops into an adulthood where only perversity is pleasant; and we are destroying the sexual innocence of our children—not by allowing them to become sexual too early (which is absurd) but by forbidding them a sexuality that is innate and artless.

Since the 70's, sexuality has been attacked from all sides. First the backlash against the "hedonism" of the 60's, with the campaigns of the "moral majority" and the Reagan conservatives. Then the HIV scare, the AIDS scare, and the new prevalence of HPV. And, all along, the ever-increasing power of feminism. Feminism, in my short lifetime, has moved from the mostly sensible claims of someone like Betty Friedan, to the breastbeating of Gloria Steinem, to the icy vituperation of Cathleen McKinnon. The most visible, and some could argue the most powerful, current of contemporary feminism is created by *women with a grudge*. A top-volume, them-against-us, take-no-prisoners feminism that, despite being mostly non-sensical, non-factual, and hysterical (and far from the mainstream) yet somehow manages to garner extensive media coverage and influence policy. Sexual politics, like all other politics now, is a spectacle, a Machiavellian made-for-TV brawl that no longer even pretends to transcend agitprop. In the latest ideology, Adam has replaced Eve as the scapegoat of history. Once Woman was evil, the tempter of Man's spiritual purity. Now Man is Azazel, the source of all evil.

This sort of hatchet feminism, added to AIDS and *just say no*, has all but obliterated an American sexuality that was never strong. Young men are (mostly) still willing, of course. But young women are vastly different than they were 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago, to no ones benefit. I am not happy, obviously. But neither are they. Anyone can see it. Apparently, though, their mothers and grandmothers don't care. Young women are suffering for the cause; the entire generation is a martyr. But perhaps it requires the viewpoint of someone with entirely different motives—that is, a male—to see that the ends do not justify the means. The ends do not even *require* the means. Feminism was proceeding just fine under its own steam before the New Neuroticism began to emerge in the late 80's. I can understand the impatience of intellectual women: I have seen it in my mother. I admit that it is way past time for men to start acting like civilized creatures, and that many remain class-A bastards. But I don't understand how institutionalizing, or attempting to institutionalize, a new Puritanism—based not on resisting Satan, but on thwarting everything male—could be seen as a logical "next weapon" in the latest Cold War. Women have always attempted to use sex as a weapon, and it has never worked for them. It didn't work when they were supposedly weaker, and it can't work now that they are supposedly stronger. It can't work because it is based on the *male-created* myth that women don't need sex, or that their desire is much less. Men invented this myth to allow themselves to do whatever they wanted with women. As desireless creatures, women needed to make no decisions about sex. They were expected to use sex as a tool, just as men were expected to use their physical strength as a tool. It was the nature of things.

Of course, only for someone for whom sex meant nothing could it be used as a tool. Men can never use sex as a tool because it is too important in and of itself. Everything else is used as a tool *for* sex. Sex is the *end* (Freud said the only end). Female historicists now argue that women have advanced beyond the sexual liberation of the 60's, where they were allowed to feel good about sex. They are now liberated not only from false societal standards, standards created by men. They are liberated *from men*. If the 60's was about feeling good about having sex, the 90's was about feeling good about not having sex. Women don't need sex. Some women need babies, but these can be got anyhow. Men can go to the devil. Hah, hah.

This is just so much boasting, though, and the quicker we get past it the better. If we have learned anything about each other in the 20th century, it should be that men do need sex *and* love, and that women do need love *and* sex. Good men demand both, because sex is not enough. Good women demand both because love is given form by sex: without sex, love becomes a cold abstraction that cannot retain its power, either for men or women.

Intellectual women are impatient for the future, and so am I. I am impatient for intellectual women to become de-Grinched. I pity my own situation, here in Whoville, but, as fairness demands, I pity theirs equally. It doesn't take a psychologist to see that 9/10's of the problems of young women arise from repressed needs, and that if they could take a man into their confidence, if they could benefit from a good relationship, much of their anger and fear would evaporate. Make no mistake, I am not saying a woman needs a man to solve her problems *for* her. But I *am* saying that a woman needs a man, and that simply having him will resolve many internal conflicts that seem overriding, but that are mostly peripheral (and many times illusory). The same applies to men, and men who try to convince themselves that women are evil or unnecessary also redirect much emotion into self-generating problems.

But our sexual enlightenment hasn't kept up with our progress in the public arena. We get along better at the office at the cost of getting along worse in the bedroom. Is this a necessary connection, or only a temporal one? Temporal, I think, and one that has roots that are very deep. The licentiousness of the 60's was, for the most part, only a physical looseness over a spiritual emptiness. That's why it didn't last. Even most of the hippies couldn't find a way to feel good about sex, even when it felt good, in a society still under the umbra of St. Paul and Augustine and Arthur Dimmesdale, where all flesh is corrupt. That is why so many "boomers" returned to conservatism in the 80's and 90's. Modern social critics and art critics are always quoting Nietzsche and pronouncing our century to be Dionysian—passionate and uncontrolled rather than rational and serene. Hence our art—think of Jackson Pollock; or our politics—the uncontrolled fury of Hiroshima or the chaos of Vietnam. But this is sheer Newspeak: spin control to press one agenda or the other. Such talk in the age of the machine is lunacy. There is nothing Greek, neither Dionysian nor Apollonian, about culture in late 20th century America, and it is my belief that Nietzsche would consider it blasphemous for his "last men" (which is what we are) to even make the comparison. The Greeks adored the body, deified the body. Their gods were immortal, not just in spirit *but in flesh*. The body itself, its coloration, its curve, its every detail, defined beauty for the Greek artist. Likewise, sexuality was a good, in and of itself. Corruptible, yes; but also organic, necessary, and, like any action, potentially virtuous.

For us, we are born into the sin of flesh and sex, which must be redeemed. For them, a child was born into the natural virtue of sex, which he retained until he made improper use of it. And art and sex were closely related for the Greek artist (as for all pre-Modern artists). The Greeks could have understood the dichotomy of the passionate high coloration and linear energy of Delacroix (as Dionysian) and the serene highly controlled color and line of Ingres (as Apollonian). But they could never understand an art, or any other social construct, that proceeded from sexual pathology. Our art is not Dionysian; it is manic. It is not the expression of an exuberant Id at the expense of Ego or

Superego. It is the neurotic cry of a depressed Id, of a repressed sexuality. The confused and incoherent yawp of smothered desire. Pollock never created his giant canvases in bacchanalian fits (as might be argued for some of those of Picasso—who was not and could not have been American). Pollock paintings were vast therapy sessions that, at least for a while, took for him the place of alcohol.

As it has gone for American 20th century art so it goes for American 20th century sexuality. Just as postmodern or postcolonial art has deconstructed, so has the sexuality that grounds it. Sexuality is mostly undefined now; so is art. Art and sex are both "pluralistic." They are both also highly inflammatory—decidedly *not* passionate, but psychotically aggressive, both from the point of the male *and* the female. Healthy sex and art are both unfashionable, and therefore nearly unknown. This is no tenuous academic connection, but a connection that affects even those who know nothing of art or social criticism. The highly educated and the socially aware may be the *most* confused, but in America, where even the dumbest are raised by the media, there is no residue of innocence. One expects even the Amish will soon create their own website and chatroom, so that they too may discuss sex in titillating detail without ever having it. The pathology of current sexuality is everywhere apparent, from the arthouse film *Elizabeth*, where the Virgin Queen herself becomes the latest role model for young women (lopping off her gorgeous locks and renouncing the traitorous Male, Elizabeth apotheosizes herself, and saves England in the process) to *Ally MacBeal*, an even more influential, and transparent, icon. Ally, who is sex-obsessed, never gets any sex: not because she is lacking or unlucky but because she is so charmingly neurotic. And the actress who plays her *is* her: no steady boyfriend to report and then, surprise, she's anorexic. She's popular because she's symptomatic. She's now standard-issue bright beautiful girl. A young woman would probably feel left out of all the wacky glitzy fun if she *weren't* a sexual mess. This week's number one movie: *Crazy/Beautiful*.

In the 90's, young women graduated from false AIDS statistics in high school to false date rape statistics in college, so it is not surprising that their attitudes toward men and sex are self-defeating. Once men have been demonized, a ritual cleansing becomes very difficult, and cannot be achieved by men themselves. But the demonization of men damns all heterosexual women, too. Some are beginning to realize this. They are beginning to recognize that the claims of self-gratification are vastly overrated. They are noticing that men's self-esteem does not seem to be effected by admitting that they need women: why should a woman's confidence be any less secure? And they have noticed that the demand that they be judged fairly implies that they judge men fairly.

It is common knowledge that men have failed utterly to live up to women's modern expectations. But for the reconstructed man, women are not very impressive either. They want to be treated as equals while still expecting special treatment. In courtship, they do not make an equal effort. They do not risk as much, especially in the opening stages. They demand to be impressed while retaining the right to be unimpressive, and not to be called on it. They are incredibly judgmental, early and vocally, on the most personal things imaginable; but they may not be judged. Basically, they now demand the right to be indulged in all things. To be equal when it suits them. To be helpless when it is convenient. To be dominant one moment and submissive the next. To be provocatively sexy and untouchably aloof at the same time. To complain of aggression and yet wear chains and dog collars and painful tattoos. To

bemoan the rapine of nature and yet to purposefully mar themselves. In the end, what is often asked is the right to act foolish and yet be respected for it. It is therefore no surprise that most of them who have boyfriends have boyfriends far beneath them. Men equally attractive and equally intelligent will not put up with their games, and so they end up with lesser men who only confirm their low opinions.

Men are not infinitely patient, and I do not think we should be expected to become so, but we do, in general, give a woman the benefit of the doubt. If a man is attracted to a woman, he wants to believe that she is also good and intelligent (or he wants to believe that she has the qualities he desires in a woman, whatever they are). He therefore invests her with those qualities in his mind: she has them until she proves beyond a doubt that she doesn't. She is on a pedestal until she pushes herself from it. This approach is logically flawed, of course, but at least it errs on the side of generosity. A woman is just the opposite. The man is in a hole until he can dig himself out. He must prove he is not a bastard like all the rest. Anything can be a source of concern. If he is attractive, he is probably vain, cold, unfaithful, rakish—at any rate, a risk. If he is intelligent, he is probably a know-it-all, cold, unexciting, bookish—at any rate, high maintenance. Talent, likewise. Money, likewise. If he has any positive traits and yet seems nice, he is probably snowing you. If he seems too good to be true, he probably is. This is not just a cliché from the most ridiculous books on the best seller list, it is standard practice, and I have encountered it from women across the board, no matter their backgrounds, politics, SAT scores, or ages.

And so, for a man, the opening ceremonies have become a time of abuse. An attractive woman always has lots of men interested in her, so who are you? You are expendable. You may be insulted with impunity. There will be three more calling next week. The woman feels that she is in control, and so is not required to be thoughtful. But she is not in control. Almost without exception, the modern woman does not pursue men. She does not approach men, she does not call men. She often does not call them back, even if she likes them. They should be persistent, she thinks (like her grandmother's grandmother), or they are not worth knowing. And so it goes. Next week she quickly insults or annoys the only decent men she may come across, and only the most pathetic continue to call her. But this sort of control is hardly worth having a revolution for. Nor does it seem exactly equal or fair.

Many of you are now shaking your heads, saying *I'm not like that*. But you are like that. I have met many of you, the PhD candidates and the artists and novelists and poets and businesswomen and scientists and musicians—beautiful, talented, highly intelligent, and completely thoughtless.

And mostly oblivious. From what we read, very few of you are in good relationships. The shortage of good men and all that. The more exceptional you are the more unhappy you are. But you make it very difficult for me (let us be specific, and personal, for a change). Either you do not go out, or, if you do go out, you go out in a large unapproachable group. You go to a loud place where no one can talk to you. Or, if you go out by yourself or with one girlfriend, you do not ever look up. You do not notice anything around you. If you see me, you pretend not to. You, as the woman, obviously cannot be expected to just walk up to some attractive guy and say *hi* (although this is precisely what you expect me to do). But you have forgotten how to flirt. You will not catch my eye, and if you do, you will not smile. You will give me no indication that my luck may finally change. But remember,

we are equals: it is just as hard for me to approach you as it is for you to approach me. I have had my feelings hurt just like you have, and, because I am expected to take the risk of the first approach, I have been rejected much more than you have.

Not only do you not flirt or give any positive indications, once I have approached you, you set up obstacles. Even the most progressive of you still play this old male/female game. Maybe you think I like jumping over hurdles. Maybe it is something you do unconsciously, so deeply engrained that it cannot be suppressed. But it meshes damned poorly with your other, more modern, demands on me. Being independent and being contrary are not the same thing. The only time you will look wistfully at me, staring and smiling, is when you are with another guy. Then you are safe. Safe from taking a risk, from making a judgment. It is these times that I think you deserve the problems you have.

You may counter that men are dangerous: you are not paranoid, you are careful. I say that this in no way excuses your attitude. Most men are jerks, granted. Conversely, most women are a mass of symptoms. Still, we must find each other. Your defenses have become so impenetrable, so non-selective, that the knight in shining armor is being sacrificed with all the miscreants. The man on the white horse riding up to the castle wall will not appreciate being treated as a peasant; and the loss, fair one, is *yours*.

Besides, many of the women who have the lowest opinion of men are the same women who frequent the most dangerous places in town, who are seen with the biggest losers, whose short list of boyfriends always seems to include a heroin addict or a recent parolee. They are in reaction, of course, throwing themselves away to spite me and mine. But can they possibly have had such a vast experience of men by the time they are 20 or 25 to justify writing off the entire male sex? This, *mes egals*, is called prejudice, no matter how bad it has been for you. And it is no more a virtue for you than it is for men.

My advice, from someone who needs you, who needs you to be equal, is to quit shirking your duty in the name of easy politics and self-indulgent psychology. Stop pretending you like being alone, that you "need time to find yourself." Stop pretending to be a lesbian because it is easier (you know who I am talking to, and who I am not talking to). I am just as important to you as you are to me, and it is time to act accordingly. It is time to begin the ritual cleansing of the primary category I find myself in. It is time to take responsibility, to take a risk. It is time to look for me. It is time to be nice.

2003

BALLS IN A BASKET

by Miles Mathis



My father sent me a link today to Peter Schjeldahl's new article in *The New Yorker* entitled "Skin Fruit." I have to get my information second-hand and filtered, since I refuse to buy or read any of the modern forms of media on my own. It's all propaganda, as one of the artists in the exhibition *Skin Fruit* admits, so why listen to it? That is the un-addressed paradox in Modern Art (one of many): as part of the con-game, the artists now admit it's all a con-game. This is supposed to be an ironic trope, or something like that, but to me it is just a continuing sign of confusion. Once the magicians/thieves/scientists/politicians/artists have admitted it is a con-game and a bald example of agitprop, why does the audience continue to show up? It is just proof the modern audience—in every field—is completely captured. They have absolutely nothing else to do, apparently: they *must* go the museum, they must read the journals, they must vote for the two parties, or they will cease to exist. Their minds have been emptied of all but the required media inputs.

But, honestly, I couldn't get very interested in picking apart [Schjeldahl one more time](#). It is too easy, and it is pointless. Schjeldahl is un-embarrassable and un-indictable. I could prove beyond any reasonable doubt that he was the son of Beelzebub, that he was draining your personal checking account every month, and that he was visiting your eight-year-old children in their sleep, and no one would care. Most of you would go on as before, and would pick up a *New Yorker* to browse in your next fit of boredom. Why? Because, as Schjeldahl says, it gives you something to talk about. Schjeldahl and his readers and all the denizens of Modernism have nothing to talk about when unprompted by the cheapsheets.

However, I did find one new thing to get me through *my* current fit of malaise and disgust, and that was Schjeldahl's mention of Jeffrey Deitch. I haven't bludgeoned Jeffrey yet, and it is just possible I may be able to push him over some ledge, literally or figuratively. I have to give it a shot.

I hadn't heard about Deitch until now, but he has been the curator at the Deste Foundation in Greece and is now the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. A newly-hatched bigwig,

in other words. An article Deitch published with *The New York Times* in 1992, which helped him move up in the world, and which was re-published with this Skin Fruit show at the New Museum in New York, gives me a tiny bit of substance to attack. But before I get to that, some background on Deitch:

The dealer [Deitch] had heard about the two young artists who spent the occasional evening ransacking a hotel room, ripping apart phone books, writing on the walls and getting stoned. Even the artists weren't sure this was art. But Jeffrey Deitch was. He handed them keys to his SoHo gallery and for almost a week they crammed it with 2,000 shredded phone books, and stabbed a broomstick and broken wine bottles in the walls for "Nest," a show that was to remain there for a month. It didn't even survive the raucous opening night party. The next morning the gallery was such a smelly, flammable beer-and-urine soaked mess it had to be completely cleaned out and refilled with another 2,000 shredded phone books. But the show captured the high-drama of a certain group of cool New Yorkers, and Deitch was considered brave for providing them a platform.

That is from *The LA Times*, January of this year (2010). I suppose it is meant to be a list of credentials for the man now in charge of MOCALA. My only commentary is to tie those credentials to Deitch's 1992 article. In it, Deitch proposes that we are even now transcending "post-modern." We are, instead, becoming post-human. Unlike Nietzsche, Deitch does not see this as much of a problem. He addresses in passing some of the possible negatives of this post-humanism, but mainly he sees it as a sales opportunity. Novelty will become exponential, which will allow salesmen like him to manipulate a quicker turnover and an even more confused and unrooted public.

What one might call the kernel of the article is Deitch's rhetorical question: will the next generation be the last generation in history that we can call human? Deitch suggests that this may be the case, and although it is clear that he is suggesting it mainly as a way to achieve poignancy, there is a clear undercurrent of personal glee. He seems to be saying, between the lines, "I certainly hope so! Because if we salesmen can utterly transcend humanity, our ability to lead the future will be unfettered. There will be no limit to what we can sell these plastic people. A people that feel a constant need to 'reinvent' themselves, whether it be with plastic surgery or with gene manipulation, are a people with an endless marketing potential. Such constant reinvention must cause a constant increase in self-analysis and self-doubt, and, as we all know, that is the recipe for a complete capitulation to products."

Deitch never actually reaches the level of poignancy I have created for him, since he doesn't like to tell the truth as baldly as I do. He slips and slides through his article like the modern invertebrate he is, only suggesting things 'umbly, like a new Uriah Heep. But even though I have given him the poignancy he lacked, I can top this poignancy with hardly any effort at all. I can stick a pin in this temporarily interesting doll I have created. Because there is a better answer to his question. "Might the next generation be the last generation that is fully human?" he asks. No, I answer, because the last generation that was fully human existed about a century ago. Our current generation is hardly human at all. If it were human to any recognizable extent, it could not read articles like Deitch's in the *New York Times*, finding them either poignant or entertaining. If it were human it could not read the *LA Times*

entry above, finding it either amusing or informative. If it were human it could not read about or visit current exhibitions. If it were human it could not abide people like Deitch in positions of power or authority. Any group of people that retained their humanity would pull Deitch out of his museum by the ears and throw him in the bay.

Only a culture of lastmen could countenance an article by a critic suggesting that we had reached the end of nature or the end of the human. Deitch ends the article with this:

What we do know is that we will soon be forced by technological advances to develop a new morality. . . . In the posthuman future artists may also be involved in redefining life.

You see, he is not suggesting we resist the loss of nature or humanity. He is telling us how to make the necessary transition. It is a thing that must happen, therefore we had best re-fashion ourselves to fit it, as he already has. Deitch has clearly already jettisoned his morality and his humanity and his rationality. He has been a fully functioning man-of-plastic since at least the '80's, so he sees himself as the perfect modern guru. His soul was tiny and barely functioning from the beginning, so he had little trouble letting it go. If you are reading his articles, your soul must be nearly as vestigial as his was, so you will feel as little loss as he did. Like Deepak Chopra, he will show you the way. Just get an expensive suit, move to the big city, and attach yourself to the nearest billionaire with a snorkel. You will be fine.

Well, I think I have had enough of Deitch already. With only a few moments of research I can see that he, like Schjeldahl, is unpushable. It is impossible to kick a man covered in Crisco over a cliff. You will just get your boots scummy. But I did find some more pictures while I was doing this research, and this will take us back to the exhibition. I started this so I may as well finish it.



That is by Jeff Koons, and it is Schjeldahl's favorite work from Skin Fruit. Yes, it is a basketball floating in an aquarium. Schjeldahl says, "It's a ravishing piece, deft and subtle, which reminds us of Koons's first-rate sculptural knack and conceptual economy." *Ravishing. Ravishing. Ravishing. . . .*

Why should I need to analyze that statement? A fully functioning human should be able to read those words, see that image, and figure it out. *New Yorker* readers, if they were human, would not put up with it. For their three dollars, they would demand an art critic whose retina was attached, however distantly, to his brain.

The same could be said of readers of *The New York Times*, who, if they were human, would also fail to be entertained by articles on such exhibitions, or by sentences like this, from Roberta Smith: "Barely any intellectual glue holds the show together." That is supposed to be a stab at Koons, who "curated" the Skin Fruit show (that he was also in). But the sharpness of the stab is on her end of the needle, since she is the fool who went to such a show expecting intellectual glue. Based on what precedent? What show of modern art ever contained a dab of intellectual glue? Did she seriously think that a man who put a basketball in an aquarium and found it thrilling would supply any measurable dose of intelligence and acumen? Beyond that, Smith is known to be an art critic: given the waters these people swim in, does anyone imagine she is capable of sorting intellectual glue from non-intellectual glue or pseudo-intellectual glue? Put simply, if she were capable, she wouldn't be where she is.

If she were capable, she wouldn't have chosen this to lead the article:



That is Terence Koh's "Chocolate Mountains," which Smith calls "implacable landmarks of waste and ruined beauty." *Beauty. Beauty. Beauty.* I just wanted to be sure the words had lost all meaning. If they still retain any meaning, say them over and over until your humanity evaporates from the top of your head. You are then ready to re-read Ms. Smith's article.

Your humanity gone, you are also ready to read Schjeldahl's final paragraph.

His [Koons] career and the plutocratic culture that it has adorned represent an epoch-making collusion of mega-collectors and leading artists, which has overridden the former gatekeeping roles of critics and curators and sidelined the traditional gallerists who work with artists on a long-term basis of mutual loyalty. With numbing regularity, newly hot artists have abandoned such nurture for gaudy, precarious deals with corporate-style dealers like Larry Gagosian, Pace-Wildenstein, and David Zwirner. In the boom era, buzz about the opportunistic exhibitions of such dealers and the latest sales figures from art fairs and auction houses were what passed for critical discourse.

Unlike most of Schjeldahl's output, those sentences almost begin to make sense. We should ask why. Schjeldahl is forced into a close pass with rationality because he is defending himself here. He is complaining about the loss of power the critic had, back in the time of Greenberg and even the early years of Hughes. He is hitting out weakly at billionaire collectors like Dakis Joannou (whose collection this show was taken from), millionaire artists like Koons (who can now ignore criticism) and galleries like Gagosian (who never had to listen to critics, since they owned them). Unfortunately, Schjeldahl proves he can't achieve rationality even when he desires to. He leaves himself wide open. First, he admits that critics were once gatekeepers, and implies they should be again. He doesn't seem to understand that the term "gatekeeper" is now a pejorative one, indicating transparent fascism. What

qualifies a writer to be a gatekeeper of art? Whistler was the first to ask that 150 years ago, but even the young artists of the avant garde are catching on. They have finally seen that the critic is just one more middleman that can be bypassed. Why kiss the critic's tush when you can plant one directly on the billionaire? Second, he implies that talk of sales figures and market buzz is a bastardization of critical discourse, not seeing that critical discourse had hit such a low, on its own propellant, that there was no possible bastardization. It is impossible to cheapen something that is already worthless. If criticism is so easily by-passed now, then critics like Schjeldahl can take full credit for that. Those who are doing a necessary job, and doing it well, are in no fear of the pink slip. We can only hope that Schjeldahl's fears are justified, and that the new art market will find a way to exist without his "help."

Finally, I must include this subtle bombshell from Ms. Smith's article: Koons collects extensively, but he collects old masters. That would suggest that the future art market can exist not only without critics, it can also exist without modern art. The 60% drop in the modern market in the past two years (according to the *Wall Street Journal*, March, 2010) also suggests the same possibility. We are only 40% away from the goal. The billionaire Joannou may be able to show his private collection in public museums in which he is a trustee, but it is doubtful this will save his "investment." The art market, like all markets, survives not only on bought or stolen PR, it must survive on a base of wealth broad enough to provide continuance. The billionaires, with their various treasury-draining schemes, appear to have forgotten that basic principle of long-term wealth. In other words, it may be that Goldman Sachs needed to keep Lehman Brothers around, just to have someone to sell their crap modern art to. If you get rid of all your competition, you also get rid of your fellow bidders at Sotheby's. It doesn't require just one stupid billionaire to propel modern art. It requires an endless line of ever-stupider billionaires. Our current batch of billionaires has no trouble supplying the "stupid," the only question is whether there is a long enough line of them.

The Future of Art



by Miles Mathis

Note: this is the first of a three-part series of articles published in *Art Collector/Art Connoisseur* magazine in 1999.

As we approach the end of the century, there appears to be a consensus that Art, taken as a whole, is in trouble. Despite booming museum attendance, and the undeniable *quantity* of new art (or of creative output), there is still a deep-seated feeling that we have fallen from grace. Even the strongest apologists for postmodernism admit that the volatility of Art now, and its lack of a definitive nature, make its continued viability uncertain at best. It still resists being a popular medium, which some think spells its doom. To retain somewhat of its exalted status and thereby keep prices high, Art has found that it must be esoteric even when it is pushing a populist message. But this alienates the masses, and Art has arrived in the tenuous position of selling mostly far-left ideologies to rich people who got rich within ideologies of the right. The market shields these buyers from the message by selling art as an investment. And criticism translates the message to the masses, hoping to encourage its continued indulgence. If enough words are written, if enough public-relations dollars are spent, most may be steered into the belief that Art is a positive social force and away from the recognition that it is the grossest of luxury items. But how long, many ask, can such a dichotomy last, especially in a society ever more concerned with "elitism"? The tension between idealism and materialism is very high, and public opinion appears to be moving from disenchantment with contemporary art to animosity. And even in intellectual circles, the arguments of art are losing their appeal. With Art as "pluralism," that is, as *everything*, theory is in a sense superceded. What is there to say about something that is all-

inclusive? Anyone who has a limiting definition of Art is wrong, *a priori*, and the philosophy of art is, in effect, dead--as in finished. Avant garde artists have already lost the desire to paint and sculpt; if critics lose the impetus to talk then Art is left hanging, as just a commodity. First its status slips, then its value, then its price. The rich abandon it as a bad investment. The masses abandon it as hypocritical. And we have a corpse.

Robert Hughes warned us 15 years ago that the body was already cold, that *rigor* had long since set in. And he was mostly right. The market has not yet collapsed, and criticism has kept its mouth (mostly because graduate programs keep producing so many tongues), but art history has stopped. Or at least paused. No new isms, no new theories, no major artists. Where to go from here? Some think Art *will* become just another mass medium, like pop music or film, answerable to a mass audience. Artists, if they are to get rich, will have to do so just like any other creative person: by selling in quantity. Others see a return to "high" decorative art, of an aristocratic sort, to give the wealthy what they want in the first place. There are various arguments about what these scenarios might mean. Some think either one is equivalent to the death of Art. Some think the first is what Art *should* be anyway. Some think that of the second. Some think Art *should* be dead in a democratic society, and rejoice at its fall regardless. A few, like Hughes, are truly sorry to see Art go, but cannot solve this dilemma.

For Hughes and all those like him I have tidings of great joy. Art will survive simply because it is not contained in any of the categories above, and never has been. This is not some new-age assertion of hope on my part. It is a theoretical truth I intend to prove, in this and subsequent articles, and in my art. Modernism, and thereby postmodernism, was created by writers in the first half of the century, beginning with, say, Roger Fry, and ending with Clement Greenberg (but including many, many others), who *invented* the schism that still plagues us. To "revivify" Art (and for their own greater glory), these critics divided art history into two major segments: the past, which was regressive, and the future, which was progressive. *All* art of the past, from the Greeks to van Gogh, was tied into a sack and thrown into the theoretical sea. It had to be to make room for more art. Old art came to occupy the category I mentioned above—aristocratic art. That most did not fit in this category did not make any difference to those who were glad to see it go. Future art, on the other hand, would be an art of *ideas*. It had to be an art of ideas 1) to give it the proper intellectual ballast, 2) so that critics could *talk* about it. What all art since Kandinsky (around 1910) has in common is that it is an art of analysis. Modern art is the artist or critic *thinking* about art.

I contend that this definition of Art was bound to deconstruct, as it has, and that this deconstruction does not doom us to neo-court painters or to *Saturday Evening Post* covers. Criticism has tried to remake Art in its own image, but Art is not criticism. It is the opposite of criticism. Art is synthetic. It springs from the imagination. Its origins are pre-cognitive; its mechanism ineffable; its consorts, symbol and myth. Criticism is analytic; its methods, rational. It meets art like matter meets anti-

matter. Art is always arrayed in mystery. Criticism cannot abide mystery. When criticism becomes more powerful than art, its methods begin to systematically destroy the foundations of art. Reason, continually watered, crowds out an etiolated imagination, and our dreams become dessicated. But creativity can never be completely killed off. And talent is ever-renewed, despite all effort to argue it away.

Art as a rational and political tool, as a subset to language or cognition, as a handmaiden to social criticism, had a built-in destruct mechanism. When Art becomes equivalent to criticism, when "thinking about art" and "art" are the same thing, then you have analysis analyzing itself, a vicious circle that can do nothing but implode. Artists need to bypass criticism and themselves ask the question that begs itself here: *what is art?* Why was Michelangelo *not* just a "decorative" artist? Why was van Gogh not just a "realist," a painter of objects? Why, exactly, was Clement Greenberg wrong: when the Old Masters were transcending "illustration" (and they were), what were they doing? What is it in an artifact that transcends dexterity and cleverness?

As Tolstoy told us a hundred years ago, it is *emotion*—emotion successfully and powerfully revealed through a visual medium. Art is not an *idea*. It is a great artifact. It is a physical *thing* that must be imagined and created. And its impetus is a private passion, not a public mission. Art cannot take direction, either from the left or the right. It is a gift of the Id, not a prescription or proscription of the Superego. Some artists know this, either consciously or unconsciously, and it is these artists who, despite all the pressures of the markets and magazines, will be the artists of the future. Whether the markets or the government or the masses respond immediately to these artists is of absolutely no matter, as our art history classes were to have taught us. Art is that thing which transcends both decoration and politics, and to look to curators, philosophers, and salesmen to inform us about Art is simply to be lost. Even after a century of chaos, misinformation, and grand attempts at co-option, the artist remains primary, and all the others can only play a game of catch-up.

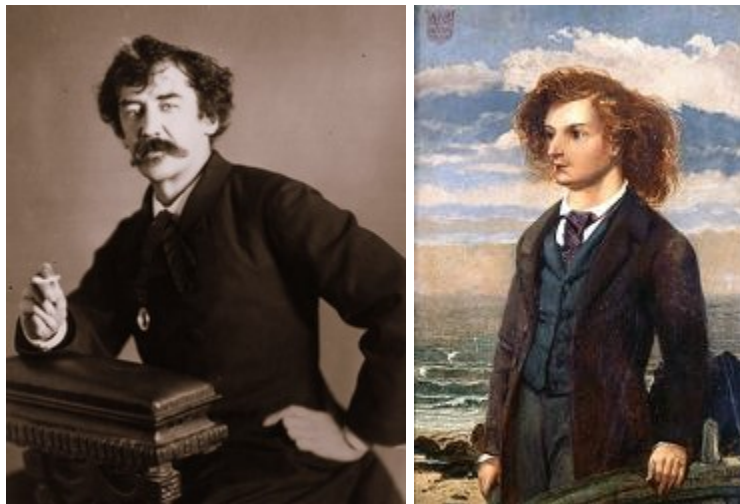
What this means for the true lover of art is that he or she must look for art in the same place the artist does: that is, inward, not outward. Like the God of Luther, Art speaks directly and requires no priests. Modernism is in trouble, but it has always been in trouble—because it attempts to substitute the sermon for the oracle, the idea for the deed. Art, which is now what it has always been, can reassert itself only person to person, work by work. And the connoisseur may know these works by the good they do him.

Art in the Past

by Miles Mathis

Note: this is the second of a three-part series of articles published in Art Collector/Art Connoisseur magazine in 1999.

In my last essay I closed with the assertion that the art connoisseur may recognize genuine art "by the good it does him." This rather broad statement demands refinement. Probably no subject in art has caused more contention, or generated more opinions, than this one. And rightly, for it is central to the definition of art. The questions *What good does art do?* or *What is art good for?* both lead to the question *What is the proper content of art?*



The painter James Whistler and the poet Algernon Swinburne*, once friends and collaborators in art, parted ways over this very question. In his famous "Ten O'Clock Lecture," Whistler claimed that art purposed "in no way to better others," that art had "no desire to teach."

It is indeed high time that we cast aside the weary weight of responsibility and co-partnership, and know that, in no way do our virtues minister to [art's] worth, in no way do our vices impede its triumph!

Swinburne disagreed. He noted, specifically, Whistler's portraits of his mother and of Thomas Carlyle as appealing to "the intelligence and the emotions, to the mind and the heart of the spectator." Swinburne, who did not share Whistler's taste for Japanese art, argued that great art required more than a pleasing form:

Japanese art is not merely the incomparable achievement of certain harmonies in color; it is the negation, the immolation, the annihilation of everything else.

Art requires content, he implied, and any enriching or ennobling content, no matter how circumstantial or uncontrived, might be called moral. Whistler complained of an aggressive misreading and publicly broke off the friendship. But between the agenda of Whistler and that of Swinburne may reside an artistic constant, and it is in this gap where we should look for their reconciliation 111 years later.

First, though, a few other historical opinions on what good art might do. For Charles Baudelaire (a contemporary of Whistler and Swinburne) beauty in art is not what is pleasing to the eye, but what is pleasing to the spirit. Baudelaire knew first hand the latitude of the spirit—how far it might stray from the good and the beautiful, and yet inform itself. Baudelaire influenced Rodin, who put it this way when speaking of his *The Helmet Maker's Beautiful Wife* (which was not beautiful): "There is only one beauty, the beauty of truth revealing itself."

For others in the late 19th century, truth was never the realm of art. For artists as different as Puvis de Chavannes and Van Gogh, art was the painted dream, a transcendence of "real" life, a personal place of redemption for existing absurdities. Vincent, to be sure, loved Millet and his peasants, even preached an early form of solidarity. But well before his seizures it was already clear that he would never consider art to be a sermon. His painting did not cry out for the dispossessed, rather it connected them to a perceived order: the swirling stars, the curling fruit trees, the muddy brogans made insignificant the propaganda of the "possessed." This order might be linked to the order sought by El Greco, Michelangelo, and the Greeks (whose idealizations concerned their own painted dreams). Even Rodin's "truth" is closer to this idea of order than it is to any social or political reality. Remember, he chose to mold the Gates of Hell, not the doors of the Republic. It also has much in common with the transcendentalism of Carlyle and Thoreau: Van Gogh was in search not of a political solution, but of a spiritual one. And it is also linked to Nietzsche, who went insane in the same year as Van Gogh. Both believed in an aesthetic justification of the world. Vincent never would have thought of art as politics; Nietzsche thought of it, and considered nothing more contemptible.

The idea of order was mostly jettisoned in the early 20th century, as all faith, pagan as well as Christian, dissipated. Existentialism was born, and temporal questions became all-important. Art as diminishing form and art as politics have battled it out: politics has won, but minimalism and deconstruction have also left a deep mark. The pre-modern virtues in art—beauty, subtlety, elevation, craftsmanship—have suffered a setback unknown since the dark ages. And order has been replaced by relevance.

In some cases, politics was the cause, formalism the tool. Clement Greenberg, most famous for espousing the greatness of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, was seen to be continuing Whistler's argument for purity. Greenberg and Whistler have both been called formalists, jettisoning all thematic content. But Greenberg argued far beyond Swinburne's conception of Japanese art—he desired the immolation of all content (including beauty) and the distillation of painting into a sort of "absolute." Hence Newman's gigantic monotone canvases with, perhaps, a single line.

Much art and criticism since the 1960's has argued the opposite. Content is everything, form nothing. This is why painting and sculpture are rarely taught anymore. Beuys, following Duchamp, made art into a political or philosophical action, an action that may or may not require the production of a "thing," an artifact. Artists in this camp argue for content while turning Baudelaire and Rodin on their heads. Art must be displeasing to both eye and spirit, otherwise it has no power to change.

In the 20th century, form and content have affected a complete separation. Form-without-content is now mostly passe, because it is less in need of criticism. Content-without-form remains ascendant within the avant-garde; and the antics of Bruce Naumann or Damien Hirst are promoted because they advance the deconstructivist agenda. For the critics, any form is now as good as any other, and even figurative painting is re-accepted as long as it conforms to the requirement for social commentary, if not subversion (think of Lucian Freud or Francis Bacon).

But the reconciliation of Whistler and Swinburne might also be, in many ways, the reconciliation of these two main branches of Modernism. Art is the necessary conjunction of form and content, and Whistler knew this all along. Whistler was no formalist. It was not content in general that he wished to dispense with, it was literary content. He said:

Apart from a few technical terms, for the display of which he [the critic] finds an occasion, the work is considered absolutely from a literary point of view; indeed, from what other can he consider it? And in his essays he deals with it as with a novel, a history, or an anecdote.

Substitute "political" for "literary" in this quote and it is updated for our time. Many will ask, once political and literary content are dismissed, what is left? Psychologism? Self-indulgent murmurings? Emotional hiccups? Whistler was fond of musical analogies, and he might ask, once such content is dismissed from music, what do you have? The answer? Music! Is Debussy "self-indulgent murmurings"? Is Mozart "psychologism"? Were Bach's Cantatas just "emotional hiccups"? Or, more to the point, is Michelangelo's *David*, stripped of his biblical and Florentine content, just a naked boy? The perverted wish fulfillment of the artist's mind? Is *Starry Night* just the product of too much absinthe? There are many in the upper echelons of art who would say so: the ones who are so au courant that they are past the naivete of being "done good" by art. Yet it is just this sort of good that art is fitted for: not agitprop or allegory, but the otherwise formless conviction that we are not all, or always, "A little, wretched, despicable creature; a worm, a mere nothing, and less than nothing."

*Swinburne wrote a poem, *Before the Mirror*, for Whistler's painting *Symphony in White no. 2* —the poem was mounted on the frame of the painting for its first showing in 1865.

ART NOW

by Miles Mathis

Note: this is the third of a three-part series of articles published in *Art Collector/Art Connoisseur* magazine in 1999. It has been published on my homepage since 2002, but few will have known that it was preceded by two other articles.



I am the *chasm odonton*—the mouthful of teeth. The ripper of armchairs: the ghost of Tolstoy, the right arm of Caravaggio, the sword of Cellini.

Beware Ye of Troy, I come bearing gifts. Words that shall bring your houses down upon you.

James Whistler subtitled his book of letters (1892) *Messieurs les Ennemis*: Sirs, My Enemies! Such joyful antagonism is not stylish these days. It is one thing to quote Nietzsche, as everyone on both sides of every argument now does; it is another thing entirely to write like him....

But the critics, the *litterateurs*, have dished it out for the last hundred years, vilifying all, dismissing everyone and everything that could not be "pinned and wriggling on the wall." And the artist remained silent. Under the Usurpers' rule, modern art has become like Lewis Carroll's four branches of math: "ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision." And the artist was silent. In the protracted squabbles of the self-appointed purveyors of taste (disputing false coinages—various Isms and flatnesses and Pops and Neo-nullities) both form and content have deconstructed; and the homunculi and homunculae have ascended to the throne, naming their horses and gerbils co-Consul. And the artist has remained silent.

As Whistler, the Master of Badinage, put it,

Art, that for ages has hewn its own history in marble and written its own comments on canvas, shall it suddenly stand still and stammer, and wait for wisdom from the passer-by?—for guidance from the hand that holds neither brush nor chisel? Out upon the shallow conceit!

It is time for the artist to speak! To crawl out from under the woodpile, and to stamp his feet. To reclaim the armor of Athena and to demand his inheritance from the Witchking. To bend the bow and pierce the axeheads and slay the suitors. To load the sling.

It may be asked, what of the other "artists"? What of the Moderns: the ironmongers, the paintspillers, the glumens, the undertakers? Isn't your quarrel with them? No. There are no artists in that quarter. Only critics. Critics who flap and critics who chirp. But the critics who chirp are the louder. It is the critics who *explain* the onanism, the mastication, the ululation and defecation who must be outlandered, outbuggered, undercut and overtopped. Trimmed and fluffed. Defeathered and Retarded.

It is thought that I am mad. But follow me through the gentle maze, and listen: Clement Greenberg, the Pope of Presumption, said, in 1955,

Though it [painting] started on its "modernization" earlier perhaps than the other arts, it has turned out to have a greater number of expendable conventions embedded in it, or these at least have proven harder to isolate and detach. As long as such conventions survive and can be isolated they continue to be attacked, in all the arts that intend to survive in modern society.

Here is the green worm at the core. The seed of the wart. Because Mr. Greenberg could smoke more cigs than anyone else, he got the title page, the banner, the masthead, and everyone since has written in very small letters I must make art that is about art, over and over until the book is finished, the corpse burned and the ashes scattered. The most galling thing is that "intend to survive" threat. As if the artist need justify his existence to the critic. But I am the primary producer here: you can justify yourself to *me*, you future footnote, you Eunuch-of-the-Muses!

Arthur Danto wrote, in 1994,

It was as though there were some internal historical development in the course of which art came to a kind of philosophical self-awareness of its own identity. In a curious and somewhat perverse way, I thought, art has turned into philosophy... From now on the task is up to philosophers, who know how to think in the required way.

Arthur Danto, philosophy professor, Columbia University. And now art critic, *The Nation*. Dear Mr. Danto, I have only one question. A question of grammar. Does "in a curious and somewhat perverse way" modify "I thought" or "art has turned"?

Basta! Finito! The whole claim of modern "art" is so absurd it isn't worth pursuing any further! The very existence of such theories, their acceptance by anyone, is cause for a century of *Weltschmerz*, of weeping and rending of tunics. It may seriously call for some sort of ritual cleansing, an act of purification, an offering to the gods. A bevy of frenzied virgins to tear some smug bastard in Soho limb from limb for his sins to art. At least an off-Broadway tragedy of Sophoclean splendor, with wild-haired corybantes whirling in their bacchanalian madness, depicting this catharsis.

Oh, Fathers and Teachers, I claim that analysis is not art. Philosophy is not art. Politics is not art. Destruction is not art. Framing is not art. Finding is not art. Thinking is not art. Randomness is not art. Pathology is not art. Everything that a fool does easily is not art.

Fathers and Teachers, I claim that art is rare. Art requires talent. Art requires isolation. Art requires depth. Art requires subtlety. Art requires mystery. Art requires emotion. Art requires inspiration. The artist tells you what *he* must do, not what *you* must do.

Fathers and Teachers, I maintain that all art stands upon two legs: craftsmanship and character. Technique is a means to an end. Technique is not art. Emotion is not art. Together they may be art. Or not.

Oh, Fathers and Teachers, to the young artist, ask first this question: would you rather be the greatest artist of the 21st century, and be unknown during your lifetime; or be the richest artist of the 21st century, and know that the ghosts of Michelangelo and Van Gogh are laughing at you?

We must burn the fields and plow twice and find fresh seed. The error runs too deep. We must change the binary code from 0's and 1's to 3's and 8's. The gravitational forces have become too strong, and the young artist cannot get out of bed, much less hang the sky and kiss the cloudfroth. Even Vincent had to live on the outskirts of a dying star; now he would have to survive on the lip of the Black Hole. We need forty days of rain and a smallish Ark.

Mon Dieu! All of history lies at our feet. The soil is so rich it stinks of fertility. And yet we paint, or paint over, the same things, each morning, shoe and unshoe the same horse *ad nauseum*. Someone

paints a saint and someone else defiles it. A man in Jackson Hole paints a landscape and a woman in New York City rapes herself upon it. All sequels. All reactionary. The avant garde even more than the merest bowl of fruit. The "sage of the university" says, *but there is nothing new under the sun*. Not until we create it, Brother Ass. Refrain from breathing all the available air for a moment, refrain from blocking all the light, and see what lovely vines begin curling out of the earth!

The Rise of the Gallery

by Miles Mathis



Jasper Johns and Leo Castelli
with Castelli IN FRONT!

In many papers over the past five years I have exposed the various corruptions of the art world. All but one. I have not yet attacked the gallery directly. Some will think this was expedient, and most will think it would be more expedient to continue my silence. But I decided long ago it was most expedient to tell the truth, and this is part of my truth. “Expedience” is “being suited to the end in view,” and the end I have in view is an art market that is healthy. If my accountant should demand that I begin being selfish in choosing my topics, rather than reckless, I could reply that my art will never flourish in a corrupt market, and that only a rectified market will have a place for me. But those who know me will know that is only a rationalization. I would have my say, and enjoy the speech, though I should hang for it on the morn.

Let us start with a lesson from Economics 101. In any sale, you have a buyer and a seller. With no other market considerations, we would assume each party has an equal amount of power in determining the

sale. If we assign a number to the total power, say 100, then the seller has a power of 50 and the buyer has a power of 50. Now, if we bring in a third party, this third party must get its power from the available pool. Which means that, even if this third party is completely friendly to both original parties, the split must still be 33 to the buyer, 33 to the seller, and 33 to the third party. This third party is of course called a “middleman.” Using his own flattering terms, he is said to facilitate the sale. But even if he does facilitate the sale, he does not and cannot facilitate the power sharing. Once he enters the equation, the two original parties can only lose power. Even if we imagine the middleman is not predatory, the situation in itself is predatory. One or both of the original parties must lose.

In the art market, the gallery is the middleman. The gallery produces nothing and it buys nothing. It is neither buyer nor producer. It only facilitates the sale. Despite this rather obvious fact, the modern gallery has arrogated to itself a power that far outstrips that of the buyer or the producer. For the gallery *has* turned out to be predatory. As in all modern business relationships, each party has tended to try to maximize its own profit, but the gallery has turned out to be more efficient at this. Why? *Because that is its sole concern.*

The buyer of art finds himself in a less predatory posture than he is accustomed to, as a wealthy person. He may even think of himself as vacationing from business. Buying art is part of his time off, and maximizing profit may take backstage in his mind for the moment.

The artist is even less inclined than the buyer to think in terms of maximizing profit, for a number of reasons. One, those who tend to think in terms of profit do not become artists. If you want to get rich in an efficient manner, you don't go into art production. Two, the artist's first concern is producing art. The artist must actually develop a skill and put it to use. Maximizing profit is neither an artistic concern nor a concern of craft. For most artists it will play a secondary role. For many it will play no role at all.

But the gallery has no other necessary concern. A gallery owner may profess to love art. He or she may actually love art. But it is of no concern to the business that this is so. From a business standpoint, it is not a *necessary* concern. In fact, galleries run by owners who do not love art normally prove to be more successful, since such a love must work as an ideal or a prejudice, and business cannot abide such a prejudice.

A buyer's success is not usually judged on financial concerns. If the buyer has bought paintings that he likes, and continues to like, he has been successful. If an artist has created paintings that he likes and continues to like, he is successful. But a gallery's success is judged financially. A gallery that makes money, no matter how bad the art, is a success. A gallery that fails to make money, no matter how great the art, is not a success. So it is clear what the gallery's priorities would tend to be.

Most people think the gallery makes money from the clients only, but the gallery actually makes money in both directions. The more of the clients' money it can get, the better; but also the more of the artists' money it can get, the better. The gallery is therefore in some way predetermined to eat into the power shares of the other two parties. The more power it gets, the more money. Power percentages tend to turn directly into cash percentages, so the gallery pursues both simultaneously, and for the same reason.

As the weakest of the three parties—from a bargaining standpoint—the artist must become more and more marginalized in this trio of interests. If, in a perfect world, the artist could expect 1/3 of the power in the sale of art, in the real world the artist has seen his percentage drop far below that. Not all markets or galleries are the same, but in general the gallery has poached far more successfully into the power of the artist than into the power of the client. Since the clients are relatively wealthy people, their interests in the sales are less malleable. They want what they want, and the gallery normally has to more or less cater to that want. In the avant garde markets, this want has been manufactured to a large degree, as I will show; and in realism it is manufactured to a lesser degree; but, at least in realism, the client will always retain a large part of his original 1/3 share of power. He has the money in his pocket at the beginning of the transaction, and this fact must always work in his favor.

But the artist, as producer, has the same problem all modern producers have: he lacks time for “doing business.” For the gallery, doing business means selling, and selling means maximizing profit. This is all the gallery does. For the artist, working means producing the product: painting or sculpting it. Farmers have the same problem, since they cannot spend all their time maximizing profit: they have a crop to plant and to harvest. This is why farmers are also preyed upon by middlemen. All producers are.

“Maximizing profit” is what galleries do. “Maximizing profit” is not what artists do, except (perhaps) when they have finished painting. Many people, including many artists, think that artists hire galleries to “sell for them.” But galleries do not sell for artists. Galleries sell for themselves, and the artist must still bargain and fight for his share of the power. The gallery is not the artist’s agent. The gallery is the agent of the client. In truth, the gallery is paid a hundred percent surcharge by the client to find art for him. To the gallery, the artist is the “found art”. The gallery sees the artist as the field to be reaped, not the master to be served. In the end, it is not the artist that has hired the gallery, it is the client.

Now, some galleries are less predatory than others. A few galleries are still as beneficent as they can be, under the circumstances of business. I have worked with some of these galleries, and still do. But they are quickly becoming a thing of the past. A gallery that does not maximize its profit at every turn—a gallery that fails to prey off both its clients and its artists—finds it more and more difficult to compete with galleries that do. What is true for Fortune 500 companies is true for local galleries; and under our system, the least beneficent tend to prosper.

Many people have asked, in print and in conversation, why art was so much better in the past. Why were the paintings so much better? Why were the artists so much better? Why did the artists seem “bigger”?—more independent, more influential, more genuine? Why did art seem healthier? There are many reasons, and I have addressed a large number of them in other papers. But none is more important than the rise of the gallery.

Before the 19th century, there were very few galleries. There were almost no galleries as we know them: streetfront businesses dealing with the public. If you look at Renaissance commissions, for example, you will find the artist dealing directly with the client. Pope Julius did not contact

Michelangelo's gallery or agent. No, Michelangelo was contacted by the Vatican directly and he talked to the Pope in person, face to face. The two men shouted at each other across the papal desk. And, what is most refreshing, they shouted not only about payment, but also about art. They got worked up not only about money, but about ideas! Imagine that happening today.

Minus the Olympian tantrums, this was the way of art for the next four centuries. Artists and clients set the terms of the commission face to face, with no middleman. As late as 1900, Rodin was still dealing with clients on his own terms, with no outside involvement.

This is why art was healthier: the artist had not yet become emasculated. The artist held "the power, and a famous artist might hold much more than". Even a weak artist would not expect to fall below 1/3. With only two parties in the transaction, even the weaker party could expect a large share of the total, and thereby demand respect. But with three parties, a weak artist could find himself with only 1/5 or 1/3 of the power, or less. And a minority share tends to be a diminishing share, as any economist will tell you. The weakest party is the most attractive to predators, and once the share falls below parity, it is ripe for plunder. Historically this is precisely what happened. The artist fell below 1/3 in the three-party system, and his share was attacked as "vulnerable." Yes, the producer was and is actually attacked as the superfluous party.

Currently, there are two separate paradigms for the gallery, and it is probably best to separate them. It is counterproductive to criticize the modern gallery, as if there is only one species of the beast. In fact, there are two: What I have called the avant garde gallery and what I have called the realist gallery. The avant garde gallery is the big city gallery that sells Modernism and its offshoots: abstraction, minimalism, conceptual art, installations, and so on. This market is heavily influenced by politics and theory; one might say it is *determined* by politics and theory, except that it is also determined by profit. Only the artifact is determined by politics and theory; the market is determined by profit.

The realist gallery sells mainly decorative art, although real art occasionally gets exhibited by accident. The realist gallery is also determined by profit, but at least the realist gallery is (mostly) free of politics and theory. The realist gallery is not *entirely* free of politics and theory, but the politics and theory, when it is present, is normally of a shallow bourgeois type, and is completely subconscious and unintended. The politics and theory are an invisible undercurrent, with variable strength and direction; not a conspicuous and strident flood, required and policed.

The avant garde gallery has been exponentially more successful in the recent past, and although most would attribute this to a critical and intellectual alliance with other power structures, the primary reason is its success in poaching power directly from artist and client. Although the avant garde gallery has admittedly been much more successful at *using* outside interests like politics and theory as a tool of promotion (as I have pointed out in other papers), these interests have only been a tool. That is to say, it would not matter that critics and academics liked Modernism, if rich people did not take the bait and buy it. The avant garde gallery gets neither power nor money from critics or academics. It gets power and money only when it convinces the client or artist to give them up.

The clients of the avant garde gallery have given up both, in spades. They have handed over exorbitant amounts of cash for trifling and ultimately worthless constructions; and they have given up very nearly their entire 1/3 share of power, handing it directly to the gallery. The client of the avant garde gallery has no will or mind of his own. Whatever the gallery and critic and academic offers him as profound, he accepts as profound. He is a pathetic pawn, even more pitiable than the contemporary artist. A person totally devoid not only of taste, but of will: an utter slave to the most manufactured and vulgar market that ever existed. He cannot even claim to be robbed, the victim of a horrible crime. No, for he sought out this humiliation, freely entering a contract that told him he was a fool on the face of it.

But the avant garde gallery has not only poached in the direction of the client, it has poached just as successfully in the direction of the artist. And the same critical and academic alliances have allowed it to do so. The same theory and politics that allowed for the complete surrender of the client have allowed for the complete surrender of the artist. The artist has not surrendered the whole of his financial share, since he still gets a paycheck. But he has surrendered the whole of his 1/3 share of power, since he now has none. The avant garde artist has absolutely nothing to say about what is art and what is not art, what is hot and what is not, what is theoretically or politically viable and what is not. Those decisions have been farmed out to critics and academics. And since critics and academics are the tool of the gallery, the power ultimately falls to the gallery once again. That is why a gallery like that of Leo Castelli could exist; why a man like Leo Castelli could become so powerful. At Leo Castelli, the gallery had successfully poached very nearly 100 percent of the total power of the transaction. Simply by using a tool provided them for free by the critics and academics, the avant garde galleries were able to bring both clients and artists to their knees. Look again at the picture at the top of this page. Castelli is the king on the throne; Johns is just there to support his chair.

Let me say it again: Leo Castelli never created a thing. He was neither buyer nor producer. He was nothing more than a middleman, a facilitator of a sale. And yet he somehow convinced the world to give him this mantle of power, a level of fame and wealth achieved by almost no one else in the arts in the 20th century. It would be like a Steinway salesman becoming more famous than Van Cliburn. This sort of reversed hierarchy is possible only in a completely perverted and debased market, where all involved are ignorant of every concept: artistic, moral, *and* economic.

People have asked, in print and conversation, how a gallery like PaceWildenstein or Gagosian can convince clients to pay so much for so little. Well, the alliance to theory and politics, to critics and academics, was the *tool* that allowed for the usurpation of power. But the *power* came from the client and the artist. The clients and artists could just as easily have ignored the critics and academics, and if they had the tool would have failed. The gallery has succeeded only by the freely chosen surrender of the client and artist. Power that is taken must also be given, and the client and artist are just as guilty as the gallery.

The realist gallery has not been as successful at poaching power from the client, but it has been almost as successful at poaching power from the artist. In realism, this has been achieved through a general and long-term dumbing-down of the market. Since all the so-called intellectuals were peer-pressured into following the avant garde market, realism has found it most efficient to take what is left to them

and run with it. Meaning, it has found it easiest to appeal to non-intellectuals. There are a few very smart people in the realist market, both as artists and clients, but by and large the realist market is a market for the hoi polloi, for people who will admit to a complete ignorance of almost everything (except business) with a smile and a handshake. They don't know anything about art, modern or traditional, and don't want to know anything about art. They just want something to go over the sofa. They don't have good taste, and aren't concerned with *seeming* to have good taste. They don't want to hire someone with good taste—someone with an eye for color or line or composition or beauty—to school them on the subject, they just want to be free to put garbage on their walls, and not be taken to task for it.

This would seem like a great annoyance to the realist gallery owner, and to the few highly educated ones it is, but to the majority of galleries it is just one more business opportunity, and they have finally seen it in those terms. The vulgarity of the clientele means the gallery doesn't need to look for talented artists. Hacks will do just as well, and hacks are much easier to manipulate. Hacks don't have any bargaining power, since there is an endless supply of hacks. If some hack artist sells well for a couple of years and starts to get uppity, the galleries just hire a new crop of hacks. That is why you see very few "living masters" in realism. The galleries prefer to work with "emerging" artists and "mid-career" artists: they have no power. They make no demands. They have no expectations. Older artists either have to retire or open their own galleries or make most of their income from teaching. The well-known realists like Schmid and Leffel and Greene are respected much more by young students than they are by galleries. Look where the top names in realism are showing. There is almost no top-end to the realist market.

For further proof, look who does financially inhabit the "top end" of realism: people like Pino and Thomas Kinkaid. These people aren't artists, they are galleries posing as artists. This is particularly clear with Kinkaid, but it is also true of Pino and the rest. Pino is just the current king of the hacks, a print machine posing as a painter. He is allowed to remain in the market, despite his age and his prices, because he has no demands. He was created completely by the promoters and he knows it. He is not going to "bargain" with these people: that would be like bargaining with God--you can only lose. If Pino so much as coughs in the wrong direction, those promoters can bring in the next slick illustrator and school him on what is hot. Pino will then be back with Fabio before the puddles dry.

And why are so many of the big names in realism ex-illustrators? Most think it is because that is one of the only places people still learn to draw, but that is only a small part of the answer. The larger part of the answer is that realist galleries and illustrators are a perfect fit. Illustrators are used to working for hire, under orders, with very little creative freedom. The realist market therefore seems like a breath of fresh air to them. They get paid more for the same amount of work, and if they have to paint in some sleazy genre, so what? It is no worse than what they were already doing, and is usually better. Look at Pino, for example. His output now is pure kitsch, sugared like an evaporated root beer, but it is a thing of transcendent beauty compared to the Harlequin covers he used to paint. I could say the same about dozens of top artists.

Here in Taos this month, the latest phenom is Nicolai Blokhin, who is currently having a show at the Fechin Museum. Fechin's ghost must be rattling his chains at finding this slick phony inhabiting his lovely house, even for a few weeks. Blokhin is the beneficiary of some first-rate promotion, but his paintings look like Pino's, with more drips. In other words, more empty-headed illustrations with bright colors, flowers tarting up every painting, and gratuitous brushwork to impress the vulgar. Some leading Arizona galleries discovered a market for "Russian impressionism" in the 90's, and this is what it has devolved into only a decade later. In order to further popularize and bastardize the market, these promoters trolled the Russian academies for artists willing to prostitute themselves in America, and were no doubt swamped by applicants (who understandably wanted to flee hard times at home). To be fair, I have a lot of sympathy for the plight of Russians: thanks to our own fascist government we here in the US will likely be where the Russians are within a decade. Beyond that, I exhibited with a number of Russian and Chinese artists at Quast Galleries here in Taos in the 90's, and was proud to do so, since they were producing some very nice work. But I have to say that one Pino is more than enough already: the last thing the realist market in the Southwest needs is an influx—from anywhere on the globe—of more bright, slick, commercial hackwork. We are already inundated with worthless giclees and the worthless paintings that seed them. If the Russians want to come over here and join us—and they are welcome to—they should be required to offer us some real paintings, not these technicolor eyesores, worthy to hang only in the red room at Graceland or the corporate headquarters of Wrestlemania.

This fact of realism trickles down from the top to the lowest levels. At all levels you find artists with no power, prostrate before the gallery. They wouldn't think of arguing with a gallery, since the gallery is their bread and butter. Without the gallery, they would be back in advertising, working for Coke or Nike or Disney. Many of them came from there and don't want to go back. All that is understandable, from a human point of view, but from an art-historical view, it is nothing less than a shame. It explains why realism looks more like a Nike ad every decade. The artists learned to draw under that rubric, the clients learned to see under that rubric, and they don't know what to make of real art anymore. Compared to advertising and Disney and Hollywood, the volume knob of real art is turned too low. In a word, subtlety doesn't sell anymore. Beauty doesn't sell anymore. The clients fall for the vulgar clang and clatter, the gallery demands it, and the artists are more than willing to supply it. The Florentine eye of the 16th century was impressed by *David*; the 21st century eye is impressed by Shrek.

Realism has already dumbed down the level of a Nike ad, and it will only get worse. I have been in the market for less than 20 years, but I have seen the slide even so. The art in a realist gallery is noticeably tackier, more commercial, and less skilled than it was in 1990. The small boom in realism in the last decade has provided us with a few brightening points here and there, and in certain places the top end of realism has broadened and refined itself somewhat. There are real success stories: a handful of artists swimming against the tide, a smattering of new schools teaching again the old religion. But by and large, the boom has not positively affected the realist gallery. More realism has meant more bad realism, not more good realism. Great swaths of new realism look like what I call "high school art," tepid copies of tepid photographs. [And it is not just the lower ends of realism that I mean here: at the highest levels of the avant garde market we find this sort of high-school art—see David Hockney and Alex Katz and Gerhard Richter and Damien Hirst, for a start. These artists often claim the bad painting

is a statement about something, but that is just a dodge. A bad painting is a bad painting, and no amount of attached blurbage can make it anything else but a bad painting]. But even the more technically advanced art is tepid, or worse, vapid. The vapid galleries, fronting for vapid clients, require various proofs of vapidness from the artists, and the artists in tow are hand-picked by their success in proving it. So you see a market-leading gallery like *John Pence* or *Forum*, supplying clients who can think of nothing for their art to “say” except “I am gay” or “I am shiny” or “I am boring.” These galleries show paintings of shiny typewriters or shiny gas masks or shiny empty faces: plastic art for plastic souls. How about a painting of a guy at the gym? How about a painting of an empty hallway? How about a painting of an envelope? How about a painting of tea kettle? How about a painting of a grape? **How about going back to illustration if that is what you want to paint!** Disney can always use a great drawing of a broom for that remake of *Fantasia*, or of a dancing teacup for *Little Mermaid 8*, or of a shiny Harley for that fifth sequel to Alladin—*Alladin goes to Las Vegas*.

In talking about the avant garde market, I was speaking from outside the market. I have never been a player in that market, so I cannot speak first-hand. But I have been a part of the realist market for many years now. I know what I am talking about. I have hung in the same galleries as Pino and Nerdrum and Richard MacDonald and many others. I have talked to these “art loving” gallery owners face-to-face. I know them. I know how shallow are their depths. I have seen how little they know about art, how little they care about art. I have been with the illustrators, big and small. I know that they are more interested in your studio than they are in your art. They judge each other mainly by square footage. I know the major magazines and their editors: they and their readers are also more interested in a tour of the studio than a close look at a painting or sculpture. They are more likely to comment on a large easel or a large frame than on a painting. It is best to keep the whiskey out of sight when these people visit the house, otherwise they can’t concentrate at all: they will be headed toward the kitchen the whole time.

I will tell you some stories, to leaven this lump of polemic. In real life, I don’t talk much, so very few people have heard these stories. If I have a low opinion of realists, realism, and realist galleries, you may understand why after this. One of the first shows I went to, as a participating artist, was a show in Austin, at the largest gallery in that city. I was one of two artists being featured, and the other artist was much older than me. I had not met him before and no one introduced us at the show. He was drinking heavily and would not meet my eye. By the end of the show, he was manic, almost in tears, and he apparently caused a big scene after I left. But what I remember most is that no one looked at the art. Everyone “mingled”, eating cheese and drinking wine, making small talk. I don’t think anyone talked about art, mine or anyone else’s. I remember talking to some older lady, very tan and wrinkled, and she was telling me about her vacation somewhere in the tropics. I was nodding politely. Suddenly a 50-ish man approached us, carrying at least two gin and tonics. He was very sure of himself despite the booze. Without looking at me, he asked the lady, “Who is this, your cabana boy?” She said, “This is the artist.” He didn’t even bother to apologize.

Several years later I was scheduled to have a one-man show with this same gallery. The afternoon before the opening, I went in to check that the lights were set right and so on, only to discover that my biggest painting had been taken down and was facing the wall. The owner's wife had decided that the painting was "too nude" and that it might offend someone. I threatened to walk out with all my paintings, and the work was finally put back on the wall. But I heard later that after the opening a screen was put up. It was taken down only by request, or if they saw me driving up.

I switched galleries after that, moving to a smaller gallery across town. After a couple of quick sales, the owner decided to have a one-man show. She wanted to advertise and she asked me to go halves on it. I said no. I told her she was already taking 50% and that she should pay for advertising. Two of my galleries were by then selling well, taking only 40%, so I didn't feel pressured to accept every term offered me. She decided not to advertise. She called me in and showed me the mailer, which was nice but it was in black and white. She said I could pay to upgrade to color. I told her no. I told her promotion was her job. Next she would have me going halves on the air-conditioning and the trash pick-up. Of course the show bombed, and she called me in to scold me. She said I needed to paint things that were more salable, like landscapes and fruit. I told her she needed to learn how to sell, and not to blame me for her stinginess. I said it was interesting that I had been the greatest artist she had ever seen before the show, and now I was not so good. Had the very same paintings suffered such diminishment in only a month?

The first major show I entered was about this time, in Dallas. A big-name realist had been brought in from out of state to judge. To insure anonymity in judging, the hanging committee taped over all the signatures. I found this odd, but interesting nonetheless. I was curious to see how it would affect the judging. It affected the judging in this way: the judge was forced to turn the paintings over and look at the names on the back, in front of everyone. He did his judging as a performance, with the local committee crowding around him and hanging on his every pronouncement. They were not offended at his cheat, and laughed it off immediately. And it is not surprising that they did, since they and the judges' friends won all the top awards. I saw him turn over several works and say something like, "Oh, that's Sherry's. I thought so." I won a second and a third, but all the first prizes and best of shows went to insiders. In response, I removed the ribbons from my works, threw them on the floor, tucked my paintings under my arms and walked out. Needless to say, I never entered that show again.

I began working with Greenhouse Gallery in San Antonio very early in my career. They sold pretty well for me and set me up on many portrait commissions. They also took 50%. Beyond publishing black and white photos of my work in their newsletter a couple of times, they did no advertising and no shows for me. The only shows I took part in at Greenhouse were Oil Painter's of America shows, in 1995 and 1996. I remember the quality of clients at the OPA shows. There were very few sales, and the conversation was embarrassing. One or two "conversations" stand out. A short lady with badly bleached hair was introduced to me, and I noticed she was holding a pillow. I asked if she had had any injury. She looked at me blankly and then responded, "No, of course not, I am just trying to match my divan." I said, "Yes, you would have looked silly carrying the whole couch in here, wouldn't you?" Again, a blank stare from her.

In the other conversation, a friendly wide-eyed lady, apparently very keen on my art, wanted to know if I could change the color of Tess' hair in one pastel. She explained that her daughter looked somewhat like Tess, but with brown hair. If I would change the color, she would buy it. I suggested she simply hire me to paint her daughter: then I wouldn't have to deface a finished work. But I suspect her daughter didn't really look much like Tess, beyond the age of innocence. She preferred Tess with brown hair to her fat little daughter, and nothing came of my suggestion.

After I won awards in both OPA shows, Greenhouse finally decided, after five years, to do some advertising for me. They planned a full page ad in *Art and Antiques* to coincide with an exhibition. Unfortunately, they missed an important sale that month, from a local client who had also bought from a gallery I was with in Taos. The gallery in Taos was accustomed to give him a courtesy discount of some small amount (which I didn't know about) and he had asked for the same in San Antonio. They refused and then blamed me when he didn't buy. Their argument was that I shouldn't allow any of my galleries to discount. I asked them if they really thought I had that kind of power. I told them that how my galleries dealt with a client was up to them, as long as I got my wholesale price. I said I was not about to meddle in the minute affairs of *their* business, so how could they expect me to meddle in the same affairs of this gallery in Taos? They then said that if they were going to advertise like this, I should give them a worldwide exclusive. They did not want to compete with my other galleries. I said fine, but what do I get? You get an exclusive, what do I get? This show could bomb, through no fault of mine, and then I have no other source of income. If you want to guarantee me an income, I will sign an exclusive. Otherwise you are going to have to let me have other galleries. They decided to pull the ad and the show, and I responded by pulling all my paintings. Soon afterwards they lost their top artist, Mian Situ, and I can only guess it was due to the same sort of greedy manipulation.

A few years later, the same thing happened to me in San Francisco at Weinstein Gallery. Weinstein had actually asked for submissions from artists, in an ad in *Art and Antiques*. I had never seen that before, and haven't seen it since. I responded and was accepted. The director told me he had looked through hundreds of portfolios, but mine was the only good one in a sea of garbage. His words. I sent several paintings, and the first one sold before it was even hung. They quickly sold several more, and the director even bought one himself. They were taking 60% and I wasn't happy about it, but I planned to bargain back down as soon as possible. At least I was at a major gallery, hanging next to people like Odd Nerdrum, and selling. These guys had clients and knew how to move paintings.

The next step was a three-person show, only a few months after my arrival. Problem is, they put me with two younger artists with lower prices. I told them I expected them to get my prices up, not down. I explained that I had been in the market for 13 years and had sold a lot of paintings. I was no longer emerging. But they had this show planned before I even arrived. I put a good face on it, and imagined we could sort through things as the relationship progressed. The show was a middling success. I sold about half my works, which was fine with me. I was not used to selling out shows. Problem is, they missed a big sale and tried once again to blame me. My cover painting for the brochure was a 7-foot nude, and it hung for several weeks in the front window. I wanted \$14,000 as my cut, which is high but not so high for such a painting in such a market. Nerdrum's paintings next to mine were priced at

\$250,000, so there was no chance of sticker shock, no matter what they did. \$14,000 plus 60% is \$35,000, and they decided to round up to \$40,000. I thought that was pushing it, but it was their call. I paint the paintings and it is their job to sell them. During the show, they got an offer of \$29,000 and came to me to ask me to take less. They wanted to know if I would take \$11,000. I said, Come on! You guys are already getting \$15,000, which is more than I am getting. If I had this painting at my gallery in Oklahoma, they would be asking only \$21,000, taking a third. If you guys want a larger cut, that is fine, but you have to get a higher retail price. Don't come to me begging for money. I didn't put it that way, actually. I am not completely stupid. But I refused. I felt my wholesale price was already low, compared to my competition in the market for realist nudes, and I was not prepared to take less. So I said so.

Despite this, they still saw dollar signs when looking at me. And they were in a big hurry to cash in. They "offered" me a worldwide exclusive. They said I should move to San Francisco, let them set all my prices, and kick back. I said fine, guarantee me an income and I'll do it. But of course they wanted me to do all the giving and for them to do all the receiving. Once again, I was supposed to give them an exclusive and a hatful of other powers, but I was to get nothing in return. In other words, a contract with benefits in only one direction. I refused and they phased me out. They wanted an artist they could control completely, and they simply misjudged me. I told them to put that in their ad next time. Wanted: young artist who will submit to anything.

At about this time I had a couple of pastels featured in *Pastel Artist International*. Soon thereafter I got a letter from Bryant Gallery in New Orleans. I knew about Bryant Gallery. It was one of the top galleries in the city, and I knew a couple of artists who had been represented there. Bryant wanted to take me on, and they sent me a contract. The contract was for 50%, and I was to be responsible for shipping both directions and all promotional materials. I called Bryant and told him I would like to work with him, but that I knew this contract was far from standard. I said I would pay shipping in one direction, but would pay for none of the promotion. For 50%, I expected him to promote me. At first his director responded favorably, but then they decided they had a real person on the hook and they let me go. They didn't want a real person, they wanted a young hungry mannequin that would fold into any shape they desired.

That is a small dose of my experience. In these stories, I have talked a lot about percentages. In the 80's, it was not uncommon for a gallery to still take only 1/3. Shriver Gallery here in Taos took 1/3 well into the 90's. The gallery I work with in Oklahoma City still only takes 1/3. But this is exceedingly rare now, maybe unique. Most galleries moved to 40% in the 80's and then to 50% in the 90's. As I showed with Weinstein, it is now common in the major markets for large galleries to take 60%. I have heard emerging artists in New York City tell of giving up 70% to the gallery. At this rate, the galleries are moving toward the percentage of publishing houses. In a few years, the artist will be lucky to get 10%. For that matter, major publishers have dropped from a standard 15% to around 8% now for first time authors, so it may be that all artistic producers are being squeezed toward zero. Or it may be even worse than that. The bulk of science writers currently make less than zero. Yes, publication in the peer-reviewed journals requires that you transfer your entire copyright to the publisher, and not only get paid

nothing for it, but pay for the right to be published. You read that right: you (or your institution) pay to be published. The greatest part of science is a vanity press.

So many people want to be artists that the galleries may ultimately be able to pull off the same scam. Many galleries already charge artists to look at their portfolios. Portraits, Inc., charges artists a fee simply to submit. I wrote Portraits, Inc., a letter back and told them I hoped they never tried to recruit me. If they did I would charge them a \$10 fee to kiss my ass.

Payback is going to be hell for a whole lot of people. So many of these galleries have put themselves in the position of the publishers who refused to look at *Harry Potter* when J.K. Rowling was first submitting. They thought they knew their own business, at least, but it turned out that were ignorant even of that. When the current market finally collapses from sheer rot and rust and putrefaction, I hope the real artists will have learned their lesson. The middlemen will come begging for a real product to sell, and I hope we have the cojones to remind them of that first rule of business: you know, the one about reaping and sowing.

What can be done until that blessed time? First of all, we must recognize the various sources of corruption. It is clear that an unbridled capitalism is the primary source. Just as corporations are mandated to externalize costs, ignore long-term effects, and put the profit of shareholders above all other concerns, the modern gallery is mandated--by circumstance if by nothing else--to prey on both client and artist, and to subordinate the concerns of art to the concerns of business. As you saw above, the “logic” of the business of art demands that the most vulnerable party in the three-party equation be attacked as a diminishing interest. This means that the real artist has found himself to be an “unprofitable cog”, an “unnecessary cost”, an externalizable and ultimately extinguishable cost. In both gallery paradigms, the artist has turned out to be superfluous. In the avant garde gallery, this was clear almost from the beginning. Duchamp showed that anything can be art, which means that anyone can be an artist. It is difficult to have a union when you have no necessary skill. If any mental defective taken directly from the institution* can be drafted to create “art”, then no real artist is necessary. When everyone is an artist, no one is.

We must also recognize that the theories and politics of Modernism have not been just a change in direction, a pursuit of novelty, or a theoretical trial balloon. I have shown that Modernism has allowed for the quick and complete rise of the gallery, the marginalizing of the client, and the extinction of the artist. This economic fact has been hiding behind the great false front of Theory, but it is both the more important fact of the market and also the desired outcome. As a matter of economics, Theory has been nothing but a misdirection, the patter of a clever shill to keep your eyes off the main action. While the various parties were heatedly discussing the politics and theory, tied up in a new terminology and a thousand new words, the gallery took the opportunity to saw the lady in half. The artist (the legs and foundation of the lady) was thrown in the bin, while the now free-floating top-half, including of course the mouth, took over the show. Art is now half what it was, at best, but it cannot get on its legs again.

Seeing the market for what it is remains the surest way to change it. Most people, even those in academia, have not yet seen behind the curtain. The academics, being leftists, are surely aware of the problems of capitalism, but they have a strange ability to ignore or miss the economics of the avant garde art market. They also have a strange ability to ignore or miss the social and economic implications of their own theories and programs. They are prepared to allow the galleries to usurp the entire loaf, but it is not clear to what end. What form of progressivism does the 20th c. art movement imply? What deserving party, heretofore ignored by the elite, has benefited? Some women and people of color have been recognized by Modernism, but could they not just as well have been recognized for real achievement, rather than for being a new breed of con artist? Could real art not have become multicultural just as easily as, or more easily than, fake art and anti-art? Frido Kahlo had already shown that the field was open for both major groups; was it necessary to completely debase art in order to allow the Rachel Whitereads and Basquiats to prosper? Logically, it does not follow that we needed to destroy art and the artist in order to make art equal-opportunity. In what way was this progressive? I would think it must be *regressive*, since it implies that women and people of color cannot enter art without bastardizing it. I don't believe this is true, but the method of the critics and academics in the 20th century contradicts their stated intention. If they had wished to impress upon us the equality of all, this was the worst way to achieve it.

What about the realist market? How can that change? Again, by a recognition of the facts. Like the avant garde gallery, the realist gallery has externalized the artist. The artist has been replaced by the hack. Modern people have trouble telling the difference, since the hack may be quite skilled. The difference is that the hack, unlike the artist, cannot create depth or emotion. The work of the hack is one-dimensional, expressionless, manufactured, and dead. The hack cannot come up with an interesting idea or subject, since he or she is used to having the client supply the subject. Every treatment of every subject is flat and straightforward, with no ambiguity, no subtlety, and no individuality. The artist can take almost any subject and make it interesting. The hack, as he or she now appears in the realist gallery, can take any and all subjects and drain the life out of them. Everything the hack touches turns to plastic.

This situation externalizes the artist due to the fact that he becomes an unnecessary cost and an unnecessary burden. The artist is rare; the hack is common. Because the hack is common, he can be paid less and granted less power and respect. If the client can't tell the difference between artist and hack, the gallery has no reason to provide the real thing. The same thing would be true in a restaurant, where the diners could not tell the difference between sirloin and filet mignon. The chef will serve the sirloin but bill for the filet. The restaurant triples its profit and filet is a thing of the past.

The lower end of the market will always exist. And it should exist. I don't have any problem with decoration or illustration or kitsch or even mediocre art. I have no problem with sirloin either: not every occasion calls for filet. My problem is that there is no top end. Instead of having the full spectrum, we have decoration and illustration and kitsch posing as art. We have the lower and middle levels posing as the top level, and the top level is extinct or defunct. This is true in both the avant garde and realist galleries. In the avant garde this is obvious, since the hierarchy was destroyed on purpose. Anyone who

thinks there is or could be a “top end” to the avant garde simply doesn’t understand what words mean. But in realism it is less generally understood. It may be *felt*, at times, but it isn’t what one would call common knowledge. We have more successful artists and richer artists, and these are what people think of as the top end. But qualitatively, there is no top end. The top realists today aren’t “top” because they are better, they are top because they are marketed more aggressively. Most people have an aunt that can paint better than Thomas Kinkaid. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of realists stuck in the lower and middle levels can paint better than Pino. A couple of dozen living realists *could* be creating top level art, but the fact is they aren’t. They aren’t because there is no market for it. They are painting watered-down genre pieces in order to pay the bills. Some of them know they are doing this and some of them don’t, but that is the fact.

There is only one way to change this, and that is to educate the clients. If they are ignorant, they must be told so. They must be embarrassed into an education. The realist clients look at avant garde clients with wonderment and amusement: How can they buy such things?—piles of bricks and flashing lights and maggot-filled containers. True enough, but the realist clients also waste large piles of money on very awful things—paintings of blue dogs and motorcycles and typewriters and umbrellas and vases and mannequins and sculptures of kids on skateboards and men sitting on park benches and ugly people dancing and mimes and on and on. We cannot hope to clean up this whole mess, but we can hope to convince some few intelligent souls to buy something else: to spare the eyes of the Muses: to calm the minds of the befuddled angels. Surely we can cultivate a few dozen connoisseurs out of the seven billion bodies of the earth, a handful of subtle spirits who are not hypnotized and amazed by the flashing lights of Modernism or the *trompe l’oeil* of realism.

But beyond this modicum of education, we must resist the forces of dissolution in all the art markets: the false words of the critics and academics as well as the ever-burgeoning power of the galleries and promoters. We must organize and fight back. We must demand fair terms from all parties, we must open our own galleries, we must publish our own manifestoes and books and journals. But mostly, we must create great works, the market be damned. That is the first and last step: all the steps in between will fill themselves in, in time, in getting from the beginning to the end.

*This is literally what is now done in the UK, in seeking candidates for the Turner Prize.

In the Garden



oil
56 x 32 in.

The Garden Gate



oil

78 x 40 in.

Clement Greenberg

by Miles Mathis



Why even bring up Greenberg, one may ask? Wasn't Pop Art and all that came after a successful *coup de grace* to Greenberg and his theories? To Greenberg, yes. To his theories, no. Art theory since Greenberg, as Greenberg himself maintained, has been nothing but an embarrassment to everyone but the truly credulous. Greenberg's theories on aesthetics were false, deluded, and self-important; but at least he took the subject seriously, compared to his successors. He tried, with misguided valor, to restore the dwindling importance of art, if only in order to reflect on his own importance. He could not see that art's dwindling importance was due, in large part, to the influence of previous criticism, and that criticism could not possibly save it. But despite this, subsequent theories did not conquer Greenberg's, they simply set themselves up in the void left by his theories.

Greenberg paved the way, unintentionally, for the possibility of Pop Art and the other nihilistic eruptions since, and maybe this should be punishment enough. But I will not leave him be. His undercurrents of historicism and dialectical materialism have been refuted by the movement of art history since 1960, but much of his theory still stands untouched, and remains as a strong influence even today. Art was not moving in the direction he thought it was, even as he was trying to determine that direction, but his theories have helped determine, in a sense, what is critically viable in the last half-century. His success called the present demons out of the closet.

The best way to counter-critique Greenberg, I think, is to go straight to his articles, to begin the counterassault point for point, answering him on specifics and building a general refutation on these answers. A logical place to start is with his famous article, "Avant Garde and Kitsch" [*Partisan Review*, 1939], published at the very beginning of his career, while he was still in his twenties. In it Greenberg asserted that what has allowed the *avant-garde* to go beyond the "sameness" of academic art or kitsch has been a "superior consciousness of history," that is, an advanced "historical criticism." So right at the start, and under no cover but literary opacity, Greenberg positioned himself at the top of the pyramid. In that one sentence, the artist becomes subordinate to, and is in the service of, the historical critic.

He goes on to say, "...the most important function of the *avant-garde* was not to experiment, but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence." To do this, the artist "retires from public life altogether, seeking to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the level of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would disappear. Subject matter or content becomes something to avoid like the plague."

Disregarding the absurdity of the sentiments expressed here for a moment, I would like to focus only on the progression of the argument. There are two great jumps in logic in as many sentences: how does creating "absolutes" help "keep culture moving" (much of Modern criticism has claimed just the opposite), and how does "avoiding subject matter and content" a) raise art to an "absolute" and b) "keep culture moving"?

Greenberg does not expound or explain his thesis, he simply rushes ahead: "If... all art and literature are imitation, what we have here [with Modern art] is the imitating of imitating". Greenberg not only gives us *another* definition of Modern art, failing to tie it to previous definitions, he also continues to jump: how does the "imitating of imitating" a) express an absolute, b) avoid subject matter or content, and c) keep culture moving?

In the very next paragraph he starts off, "That *avant garde* culture is the imitation of imitating calls for neither approval nor disapproval." (Not very *critical* of him, is it? It hardly seems like a superior form of historical criticism.) He continues, "In a sense this imitation of imitating is a superior form of Alexandrianism [his word for academicism]".

In what sense precisely? In that it takes imitation and removes it one more step? This seems not superior, though, but inferior. Why is imitation inferior, but double-imitation superior? Because, he says, "There is one important difference: the *avant garde* moves, while Alexandrianism stands still." This brings to mind three questions: 1) This idea of movement clashes with the previous idea of distilling into absolutes. I would think that absolutes are fairly stable. 2) Given that Modernism moves, and that Alexandrianism does not, why is movement categorically better than stillness? Certainly the opposite has been argued well many times throughout history (by Lao-Tse, Buddha, Plato, Christ). Is *any* movement better than stillness? Should we prefer even reversion or flailing to a well-centered stasis? 3) In what sense does "imitating imitating" move where imitation does not?

Greenberg does not answer any of these questions. I found "Avant Garde and Kitsch" a very difficult read, not because I disagree with it or because its terminology is beyond me, but because it is so poorly written. The man's mind was a muddle. All of his writing is a horrible awful mess. I don't understand how it got published, or how any normal person made sense of it. I can read Dickens and Austen and Fielding and John Donne with nary a pause, but Greenberg is like a foreign language. Logic is completely foreign to it.

We are told by his supporters that "Avant Garde and Kitsch," though important, was juvenilia of a sort, and that this explains its problems. We are assured that he sorted all that out later. But in 1960 he was still thinking and writing like a college student who had read too much the night before an exam. He was still substituting coffee and cigs for sleep and braggadoccio for understanding. In "Modernist Painters" [*Arts Yearbook*, 1960] Greenberg continued the argument he had begun in "Avant Garde and Kitsch." There he said, "Realistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations of painting--the flat surface...the pigment--were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only indirectly.... Modernist painting acknowledges them directly." This is one of Greenberg's most influential ideas, although it is hard to believe now. It is difficult for a sensible person to comprehend that this recognition of a banal fact could start a revolution in painting that lasted for decades and that still has important devotees. It is discussed at great length to this day in art history departments and critical journals. Certain people still find it fascinating intellectual fare. For us artists it was a non-starter. It was like noticing that grass appears to grow out of the ground in an upward direction, displaying a conventional predisposition toward the sun; or that cows appear to lower their heads in a conventionally downward direction in consuming said grass, revealing a dialectical opposition to ground-based living structures of the

herbaceous variety. But people with active lives cannot be induced to get involved in such discussions, since we have work to do. The Old Masters would have admitted the limits of painting. But making these limits the *raison d'être* of painting would have seemed to them creatively suicidal, critically uninteresting, and historically idiotic.

Let's move on to more specific critiques, such as Greenberg's occasional attacks on the Old Masters. In his "Review of *The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci*," [*The Nation*, Nov. 2, 1946] Greenberg displays very little nostalgia for the *Dominus Dominorum*. He begins by accusing Leonardo "of an unconscious hostility to accomplishment in general, not only toward art." Greenberg gives us no evidence to support this incredible statement, unless one considers this evidence: "his lack of perseverance, and his very neglect of the rudimentary physical aspects of his metier...." Once one forces oneself past the towering irony here, one guesses that Leonardo's failure to complete a number of major works is supposed to justify such a critique. Even admitting these unfinished works, though, Leonardo is generally considered one of the most *accomplished* people in history, both for his talents and his achievements. Normally in any kind of expository writing, when one makes a claim that is counter-intuitive, non commonsensical, anti-traditional, or otherwise revolutionary (and Greenberg's analysis of Leonardo *is* novel, if nothing else) one backs it up with some sort of argument. But Greenberg's critiques are just one bald statement after another. It would be one thing if the proofs were fairly transparent or self-evident or generally accepted. But they are not. They are, in fact, preposterous, once you cut through the confident verbiage; and you begin to suspect that there is no argument because there *can* be no argument. Greenberg was lauded for the terseness of his reviews, but no one seemed to recognize that brevity is not the same thing as conciseness, and certainly not the same thing as truth. Greenberg's articles *had* to be brief: they could stand only as bald assertions. Any exposition would have undercut not just the brevity but the thesis itself. For a false statement cannot admit of much elaboration.

I know you will find it hard to believe that I not taking these quotes out of context, or that the rest of the article does not clarify the remarks I have quoted. But I can only refer you to the articles themselves, which I do not quote in greater length because it would not help if I did. Each of Greenberg's articles is an island thesis, a straight premise that you either accept or do not accept. And this premise, in each case, is contained as fully, and perhaps more powerfully, in the few sentences I quote as in the article as a whole. In this case, if you dislike Leonardo, the article will be great fun. If not, not. But there is no question of a rational discourse, and so I do not feel obligated to try and create one by more extensive quoting.

The flat dismissal of Leonardo's multiple genius by Greenberg as a "reluctance to commit himself" and as a sign of "inconstant interests" is nothing less than astounding. For we must remind ourselves exactly what is happening here. Leonardo, perhaps *the* greatest, the most prolific and varied, genius of

all time, the embodiment of the Renaissance man (in fact, the *source* for the very idea of a Renaissance man) is being called lazy and nihilistic (having an "hostility to accomplishment") by a man whose only accomplishment is *criticism*--praising or damning *another's* accomplishment. The thought of Greenberg sitting in his little Modern cubicle, legs crossed (knee to knee, of course), affectingly smoking his damn cigarettes, looking up every once in a while with a terribly clever, terribly *satisfied* look in his big droopy eyes, musing on Leonardo's or Michelangelo's shortcomings, is enough to give me a heart murmur.

Greenberg even criticizes Leonardo for "only taking the initial steps "down many scientific paths due to his "lack of a scientific method." Greenberg is guilty here of the cardinal sin of historical analysis: judging a man by the standards of a later age. He does not remember, or finds no truth in, Newton's admission that "if I have seen farther than other men, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." But dismissing Leonardo's scientific discoveries (which were legion) because they were not complete in themselves is like dismissing Newton's physics because he did not discover Relativity. Greenberg might retort, "But we *have* dismissed Newton's physics." No we haven't. Einstein *perfected* physics, he did not invent it. Without Newton, Einstein would have had no field in which to theoretically wander. And without the advances of Leonardo, among others, Newton would never have reached the height he did, as he *was* the first to admit.

Greenberg's attitude toward history is a common one. It is both a symptom of the Modern age and one of its causes. The Modern man forgets that history is a palimpsest, a page written and overwritten, corrected but never finished. He sees it instead as spiral notebook or a pad of *post-it* notes, where he tears out the top page, crinkles it up, and throws it away before going on to the next page. Unfortunately when he gets to the end, there is just one pathetic page: and it had better be right, because all the notes are in the fire.

The worst consequence of this attitude toward history is a vain and self-glorifying ingratitude. Greenberg's dishonor of Leonardo, although meant to be self-serving, is not even that. For in failing to recognize his own support, Greenberg was doomed from the start. Greenberg's field is art, and whether he likes it or not that field owes its very existence to artists like Leonardo. Without the Renaissance there is no post-Renaissance. Without art history there is no art. Without great artists there is no art history. In reviews like this one, attacking artists like Leonardo, Greenberg spent his capital. He went broke. And in founding or perfecting a movement, he bankrupted contemporary art.

In the same article, Greenberg, unsatisfied with this puerile assault on Leonardo, also aims his peashooter at Michelangelo: "Michelangelo's Sistine frescoes constitute one of those rapes of the medium that result in something splendid and extraordinary but that leave us admiring the scale and

force of the artist's nerve more than his art." As Michelangelo's defender, I will respond that Greenberg's *critiques* constitute one of those rapes of the medium in which something splendid and extraordinary is *destroyed*, leaving us admiring only the scale and force of the critic's nerve. For he follows up with, "And since these works [of Leonardo and Michelangelo] have such a deleterious effect upon artists who come afterward, they amount almost to acts of hostility toward art." Greenberg's theory of criticism seems to be, "il faut s'abêtir" [It is necessary to appear foolish-- *Pascal*]. What we are to understand here is that the two greatest geniuses in history have been bad for art, and that a Modern critic is its savior. One gets the feeling, although it is never spelled out, that the "deleterious effect" just mentioned is nothing more or less than the "little brother" complex. The Renaissance masters planted a flag so far up the mountain, actually *achieved* so much, that their successors, especially at a distance, despaired of climbing at all. I can't figure out any other way to make sense of Greenberg's complaint. Michelangelo's "hostility toward art" is simply his forgetting to leave us something to do, or forgetting to leave us something we can do *easily*. In this sense, achievement itself is inimical to the sort of "progress" the Moderns demand.

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In "'American-Type' Painting" [*Partisan Review*, Spring 1955] Greenberg says, "Though it [painting] started on its 'modernization' earlier perhaps than the other arts, it has turned out to have a greater number of *expendable* conventions imbedded in it, or these at least have proven harder to isolate and detach. As long as such conventions survive and can be isolated they continue to be attacked, in all the arts that intend to survive in modern society. This process has come to a stop in literature because literature has fewer conventions to expend before it begins to deny its own essence...." On first reading this I was torn between two strong emotions, the second much more violent than the first. At first I felt the pure joy of a researcher who discovers his thesis, or the proof of his thesis, in the mouth of his archenemy. But then it began to dawn on me: the enormity, the absolute blundering conceit, the blind (if not outright malicious) presumption of such a statement from an art critic.

Greenberg is cautious in his own field (he is, after all, a *litterateur*), careful not to attack conventions in literature heedlessly lest its "essence" be lost. But in considering painting, all restraint is gone. So much more here appears "*expendable*"--another man's inspiration, like his money, is so much easier to "expend". Why walk gingerly in someone else's garden? --*his* tomatoes are not *my* tomatoes. Purify, distill, vivisection everyone else's means to expression, all in the name of Science, of progress; but leave one's own alone, of course.

This is why the critic cannot, *must* not, be allowed to control, or even inform, the artist's agenda. Not being an artist, the critic cannot know what is expendable and what is not. Intuitively unaware of painting's "essence" he cannot know when it is in danger of being encroached upon.

Nietzsche called religion's goal "the minimum metabolism at which life will still exist without really entering consciousness." Greenberg's goal in art is analogous: the minimum metabolism at which art can exist (by definition) without really entering the consciousness of the artist or viewer. An art stripped of everything but its "essence": meaning art as a terminal patient, with only the faintest pulse. Such an art is "alive", assuredly, *compared to a corpse*, compared to *no art*. But is this all there is to a definition of a thing--its *minimum* definition? What of its maximum definition? Or even its viable definition? Modern art is art in the same way that the tiniest peak or trough on an electrocardiogram is life. But is this blip what we want as a viable definition of life, as a definition of what life can be or should be at its fullest? Would it even be correct to call this blip the "essence" of life? I don't think so. Greenberg is confused not only about the essence of art, he is confused about what the essence of any given thing might be. It is not the stripped down bare bones of a thing. It is not the least common denominator. It is not what is left after all "conventions" have been "expended". If anything it is the process of *spending* these conventions: not transcending them or excising them, but *transforming* the necessary conventions through the process of creativity into an original expression. Art is not the negation of all conventions. It is the proper use of the proper conventions, just like anything else is. Whittling away all but "flatness" from painting is like whittling literature down to the alphabet, and asserting *that* is literature's essence. It is like disallowing writers from forming words, or sentences, or ideas because these conventions betray a kitschy love for "content and subject matter." For it doesn't take a savant to see that painting's essence has been expended, if not extinguished, in the last 50-100 years, and that fools like Greenberg, meddling with unctuous arrogance where they had no business, are to blame. Perhaps the most maddening part of this quote is "in all the arts that intend to survive," as if we, as painters, are in some sense obligated to justify ourselves to self-proclaimed judges like Greenberg. But I say *I* am the creative one here, *I* am the one producing something, *I* am the primary source without which Greenberg and his ilk would be unemployed (and perhaps unemployable). Let them justify themselves to *me*!

# The day after Groundhog Day will never be the same

*by Miles Mathis*



I was requested to write this article based on recent events at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. ARC was informed that the art department there had decided to scrap its last traditional courses in life drawing and classical painting. The reason given was that these classes were no longer pertinent to contemporary artistic expression. The classes were thought of as a needless limitation upon the creativity of the students. A well-known and respected teacher there, a fine artist in his own right who has taught several big names in current realism, had been told his services were no longer needed.

Unfortunately, in pursuing this story, ARC has not been able to obtain the cooperation of those involved. We are told that the teacher in question does not want to fight about it. He has accepted the situation and wants to move on. Another reporter might leave it at that, but since I am an artist, not a reporter, I see two stories now where there was one. I see the story of the latest skirmish in the long-running battle of real art and phony art and I see the latest example of one side being too high-minded

or too polite or too demoralized to fight. I will not explicitly assign any of these motives to the teacher at George Washington University, since I know nothing about him. But I do know that if I make my claim as a generalization, I cannot be wrong. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been one long list of examples of real artists who do not want to fight—"they just want to be left alone to paint." Well bully for them. We younger artists have inherited the world they gave away, and now we have no choice but to fight. Apparently we must fight them as well, for they are just as much in our way as anyone else.

At the top of this list of people who have not wanted to fight is Andrew Wyeth, a great great artist who has never uttered a single word about art in my lifetime. I find this a very important fact, considering that he has been the most famous realist in the world for decades. He is the one person who might have made a difference. He has long had the respect and the stature to make pronouncements. Many think of him like a living Rodin or Rubens. But we get nothing—he doesn't want to enter the fray. I think of him like J. D. Salinger, holed up in his New England bower, "I am a rock—I touch no one and no one touches me." I will no doubt get nasty letters from Jamie Wyeth and Bo Bartlett and perhaps a few others, telling me that Andrew is the nicest man imaginable and he has the right to do what he wants to do, etc. Others will say this is not the age of "making pronouncements." I answer that a great man does not take orders from his age. A great artist does not accept the constrictions of his milieu. If Andrew Wyeth had something to say, *TIME* and *Newsweek* and a thousand other places would provide him immediate space. If he has nothing to say, well, he *should* have something to say. If he said what I am saying, more might be listening.

Any movement needs both practitioners and leaders. We have had only the former, and that is why we have not been a movement for so long. For nearly a century, classical art was no more than an island thesis, kept alive by Wyeth and a few others. More recently, classicism has awoken, due mainly to the leadership of a new handful. Schools have been opened, societies established. But too few are ready to fight the real fight against Modernism. They still want to hide away in their schools and societies, ignoring the bogeyman outside. We had to open new schools because our fathers and grandfathers gave away the keys to the public schools. We aren't even allowed in there anymore, as the George Washington University debacle makes clear. They also drove us from the marketplace, and scant few of us have found our way back in.

All this we accepted, either as a necessary condition of the new democracies or socialisms, or as something beyond our control, like the tides. We talked of being outnumbered, we talked of this and that, but we did nothing. We took jobs in advertising, in illustration, in Hollywood, in computer graphics. If we were lucky. Others took jobs in coffee shops or delis, painting at night.

But those who did this had overlooked two very important messages from history. 1) Numbers have absolutely nothing to do with leadership. You do not need a majority to start a revolution. The individual is always mightier than the group. You just need to stand up and state the truth clearly; the rest will take care of itself. 2) Modernism is not based upon any majority. Tom Wolfe pointed this out most publicly in *The Painted Word*. He said that Modernism was 300 people in New York City and a handful scattered throughout the world, a few in London, Paris, Brussels, Munich, Venice and the smaller cities. I suspect he undercounted a bit, but his point is well-taken nonetheless. If these people



have stolen the history of art, it is because we have allowed them to. As far as numbers go, the vast majority is behind us, or would be if we had the courage to stand up. If we put it to a referendum, we would win by 90%. I have stated elsewhere that art will not be saved by a plebescite, so I do not want to contradict myself. I am not suggesting that we put the history of art up to a vote. But I am pointing out that our begging off from a statistical argument doesn't really wash. If we wanted to use the public as a pawn—or even as our queen—we could certainly do so. The reason I have not (yet) attempted to do so is that the queen tends to march about the board unchallenged, even by her own subjects. Being jumped over by my own queen would not be a great deal better than the permanent check-mate I now suffer under.

What this all means is that there is and always has been more than enough grassroots support for real art and ill feeling toward the avant garde to accomplish anything that needs to be accomplished. There has simply been no rally. No one has yet blown the trumpet. No one has marched on city hall, no one has spent a few nights in jail for the cause. Even the letter to the editor is rare.

Near where I live in Belgium is a seaside town called Knokke. It is a town of art galleries, catering to the wealthy. On the most prominent spot on the beach they have erected two giant blobs of white cement, the largest of which looks somewhat like a nose. It is one of the most embarrassingly ugly and pointless pieces of public sculpture I have ever seen (and that is saying a lot). They probably paid a great deal of public money for it. What is more, the citizens of Knokke know this. Almost no one likes it. In a democracy or any other type of egalitarian or socialist society, the will of the majority is supposed to be sacrosanct. We would be ashamed to have anything imposed on us in any other way, in any other arena. But the white blob stands there basically unopposed. The townspeople are apparently satisfied to have their artistic ignorance symbolized in that unmistakable way. Why? Because no one has yet stood up and said, "This monstrosity must go. It makes us all look bad." No one has blown the trumpet, no one has shouted "fear, fire, foes!" No honest little child has been quoted in the paper, asking the cutting question, "Mommy, why?"

No one does this because they are afraid that the media will label them somehow. They will be a fascist or a throwback or an elitist. But how hard are these labels to counter, really? You just don't stop talking. You say, "No, I'm not, and I can prove it. And these people beside me are also not fascists or elitists. They are sensible people who are tired of having their public places look so ugly and depressing. They are people from the right, left and center who agree on one thing, and that thing is that this is not art and that you are not an artist. Will you please take your blob and go back to where you came from." If they wave one flag, you wave two. If they organize a march, you organize a bigger one. If they write 10 letters to the paper, you write 20. You don't back down.

Knokke's problem is the artistic problem of the world. It is the same problem as George Washington University. A few people make a decision that affects the whole town, and as long as the town stays at work or in front of the TV the decision stands. George Washington University is just the latest occurrence in a long line of similar decisions. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is defined by these decisions,

historically. Private as well as state universities knuckling under to narrow political concerns; state agencies and national agencies and foundations falling to the avant garde, disregarding the wishes, needs and concerns of their own constituencies. The only thing that is curious about GWU is its timing. It seems a bit late in the game to be jettisoning craft. One would have thought that would have been done 50 years ago, at the least. GWU appears to think that putting up a false front is no longer cost effective. They don't seem to see that Modernism is waning, not waxing. Modern art needs false fronts now more than ever. It needs to be able to convince the public that it is "pluralistic." That everyone is welcome. It needs the wall of lies because its façade is crumbling. It has people like me banging away with heavy hammers at the last bits of mortar, and the only lie it has left is the lie of invulnerability. But the lie of invulnerability has never yet persuaded anyone, anywhere, ever.

I have spent some time in art classes at the university level, and I can tell you from experience that the wrong classes are being dismantled. The ones that are useless to a real artist are the ones that are being kept—the ones where students stand around in cool clothes, tattooed and pierced, smoking cloves and buds by the case and talking halfheartedly about the latest theories. The ones where students punch a hole in a bucket or glue together a couple of pieces of paper or weld together a couple of pipes and they have a project. These students quite literally spend more time thinking about how to cut their hair and rip their jeans and ducttape their DocMartens than they do thinking about what to create. This has been the pattern since the 60's. There hasn't been one speck of progress made since then, despite all the talk of novelty. The brand of shoes may have changed once or twice in that time, and the waists of the jeans may get bigger or smaller, but that is all the news worth reporting. That is the sum total of creativity from the art departments.

Like with the citizens of Knokke, you would think that someone somewhere would be embarrassed by this. But the university art departments institutionalized this nothingness long ago. They codified this system, putting it writing, in unmistakable terms. Their programs and course descriptions tell prospective students who want to learn something not to bother applying. Their counselors advise that any attempt at realism will be looked upon with open disdain. The teachers themselves often open their sections with the same warnings. "Do not turn in anything to me that looks like anything. I will throw it in the trash with maximum force." I am not making this up. It has happened thousands of times; it is happening right now. Most MFA programs will not enroll realists. If you show a realist portfolio they will threaten you like a beggar refugee or an alien: someone who just doesn't get it.

This is why pluralism is a lie. At the university level, there is no pluralism, not at GWU or anywhere else. There is only the avant grade, spray painting trashcans, or collecting urine samples, or shooting "transgressive" videos. A realist at the university level would be like Mr. Darcy at an Eminem concert.

At other times in art history, this cooption of art by an unpopular minority would not have been possible. I am thinking especially of Florence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is not true that "everyone was an

artist” or a craftsman then. Florence was a city like any other, where the vast majority worked in farming or trade. The difference was that the non-artists still cared about art. The unveiling of the *David* was a municipal event, and everyone had an opinion. They weren’t shy about announcing this opinion either. You could not have erected a concrete nose and expected the townspeople to be quiet about it. If you had shown a transgressive video you would have been stoned or knifed. They cared, for whatever reason. You could argue that they didn’t have Tom Cruise or Nicole Kidman to talk about, so they talked about Michelangelo and Leonardo. But whatever the reason, things did not pass unnoticed. Especially things erected in the town square.

Now, you could erect a functioning black hole on the town square in any city in America and most people wouldn’t even notice. An asteroid could fall overnight on the steps of city hall and most people would walk around it on the way to get their plumbing license. It’s like a Monty Python skit, except that it isn’t funny anymore. I remember when I finished my 15 foot Triptych Altarpiece. It wouldn’t fit in my house, so to test the platform and the backing screws and all that I put it together in my front yard—a huge naked lady rising from the water, with poems along both sides, and candles, and the frame with fish spouting things and waves, and a sculpture in front, and all lit with spotlights so I could photograph it. And the neighbors would jog by in their togs, or walk by with their dogs, and they would glance over and then keep going, no doubt thinking, “Ah. Another 15 foot triptych altarpiece. Did I leave the oven on?”

As a society we take days off for every conceivable event and non-event. President’s Day, Labor Day, Confederate Hero’s Day. Why could we not take a day off to actually do something besides eat fatty foods and drive our cars and throw litter. We could take one day a month—or even one day a *year*—to present a town petition, to solve one problem, to build one human wall against one specific encroachment upon our humanity. Must a democracy stop with voting for someone else to do something for us? Can we not act ourselves? California has their propositions, but I have yet to see one that addressed art. Are we really only concerned about insurance or taxes or organic food? Do our museums and universities and public places really not concern us?

This is the trumpet blast! This is call from the barricades—*fear, fire, foes!* Your house is on fire and your children are gone. Or, your museum has been stolen and your children at the university are smoking themselves into an early grave. You are spending \$20,000 per annum so that they can mark the walls and throw the furniture out the window.

Ring the church bell, sound the alarm, man the hoses. The citizens are with you, they only need rousing from the couch. You cannot lose. Just don’t stop. Walk by the first attacks in the paper, walk by the pierced people cursing you with their little voices, walk by the phony academics, quoting their specious quotes. None of these is a representative majority. It is not you that may be ignored. It is them. Ask for help and you will find it. All those non-Moderns reading Antonia Byatt or J. R. R. Tolkien or Umberto Eco (a wide swath that) or watching *Pride and Prejudice* or *Room with a View* (or

even *Shakespeare in Love*), those people at the opera and the ballet, those people shopping for *Ophelia* postcards, people studying classical piano or guitar, bibliophiles, classicists of any kind. Even collectors of old model trains will understand you. They will be your natural allies. And if you need a bigger crowd, the average Joe on the street will join you, with a few words of explanation. He has no connection to Modernism, would just as soon see his tax money go to mandatory sex-change operations as to contemporary museums full of earwax and soggy pillows. If you can paint a real painting he will choose you every time over someone who magnifies the trails of dustmites or bottles flatulence or collects used toothpicks.

And to those who counsel that the Moderns and Classicists co-exist peacefully, I ask when have the Moderns ever stopped waging war for a moment? To counsel peace is to misunderstand the entire history of Modernism. Modernism *is* the state of constant warfare. Modernism is defined as the historical reaction against art. A Modernist who does not attack traditions is like a shark that stops swimming. That is what Modernism *is*. It is the war and the warfare and nothing else. Peaceful coexistence between Modernism and traditional art is like peaceful coexistence between matter and anti-matter. It is impossible by definition.

In this way a request for a ceasefire can only be seen as disingenuous, at best. “Please stop shooting while we reload.” Certainly, I would prefer to paint or pursue other projects, rather than fight. But this is not the world I live in. I ask my fellow artists, what must happen before you take offense, before you draw the line and say no more? You and your children cannot go to public school, all your institutions have been stolen, your jobs have been redefined and you have been laid off, you have been slandered and ostracized, your forefathers and friends have committed suicide, your cities have been turned into dumps and demolition sets, and not one sensible word is ever spoken about the thing you love best.

The time is now. I name February 3 as the day all the groundhogs climb from their burrows and see the dark shadow. Mark your calendar: that is the day you do something. Start making phonecalls and sending emails now, because that is the day the world hears the “YOP!” What you do is up to you. Walk the block, have a committee party, write a letter and send copies to editors, congressmen, the Freemasons and the DAR. Put up fliers. Take a megaphone to city hall or to the museum. Lay down in front of a “work of art.” Take out an ad. But talk to people, the more people the better. On this one day, creating a work of art does not count. You must talk to a real person, even if that real person is walking by you quickly at the mall because you are ranting. You must get out of the house.

And all of those reading this who are not practicing artists, your voices must be heard too. There are more of you. Maybe you aren’t as shy as we are. We need your help. Some of you have asked why art is what it is now. It is because we have all allowed it to be. If we want real art and real contemporary museums and real university art departments, then we must first demand them. We must believe that art is still possible and still necessary. There are young Michelangelos and Rembrandts out there right now waiting to be encouraged, waiting for something to do. For so long now they have had

nothing to do, nowhere to go. They have been wasted. As a culture it is our job to find them and set them to work. But we must all get involved. We must all begin to care again.

Do you hear that Mr. Wyeth? February 3. I recommend *TIME* magazine or *60 minutes*. If you are camera shy and don't like to write, dictate a letter.



# ON ELIZABETH GILBERT

*by Miles Mathis*



**I could interpret between you and your love  
if I could see the puppets dallying.—*Shakespeare***

This critique of Elizabeth Gilbert was born from watching [her 2009 TED lecture](#), but it has been filled out from reading her book *Eat, Pray, Love*. My main thesis will be that Ms. Gilbert is an attractive, smart, funny person; a good speaker with a calming voice; a talented writer with great organizational skills; and a complete phony.

For those who don't know, TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design. Three of my least favorite things. If they had included Economics, they could have had a full house. In fact, I recommend they do so, and change the name to TEDEUS. Technology, Entertainment, Design, and Economics in the United States. The most tedious, mind-numbing fake categories of achievement and study, for the misdirection of all modern effort.

TED conferences have been around since the 1980s, and from the beginning the organizers have invited the *crème de la crème* of upwardly mobile phonies to speak, including Bill Gates, Jimmy Wales, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Helen Fisher, Aubrey de Grey, Lee Smolin, Brian Greene, Yves Behar, Ben Saunders, Keith Barry, J.J. Abrams, Eve Ensler, and on and on. It could be said, either in a positive way or a negative way, that society is what it is today due to the influence of people like this. The TED

conferences act as the positive answer, allowing these people to further promote their ideas and creations (for just \$6,000 you can attend the conference and be the beneficiary of this boosterism). I intend to supply the negative answer. My critique of Elizabeth Gilbert could be translated as a critique of almost any lecturer for TED, with only a few tweaks. These lecturers have different interests and projects, but they have a clear commonality in being polished surfaces with no substance. With a few exceptions (like Jane Goodall) the TED lecturers are symbolic of a culture that has utterly lost its soul, that has replaced the éclat of true brilliance with the glare of public relations. TED tries very hard to sell itself as a gathering of genius, but it comes off as another advertising awards dinner.

The subject of Ms. Gilbert's lecture is "a different way to think about creative genius." She leads the lecture by telling the audience that her latest book became a "mega-sensation international bestseller thing." She repeats this later in the lecture, just in case we missed it the first time. Although she doesn't seem to be especially shy in tooting her own horn, she does avoid coming out and telling us she is a genius. She doesn't really need to, since the subject of the lecture does that for her. Why would she be talking about genius if she had no experience of it? Obviously, she needed to spend long hours on this question of genius, because it was so central to her method and to the side-effects of her method... of writing self-help books.

She reminds us in her lecture of the cliché of the creative person, tormented and self-destructive, possibly alcoholic and probably suicidal. Ms. Gilbert does not look suicidal or otherwise imbalanced, but we are to understand that, just beneath this shiny surface, the waves are crashing very hard. She tells us she got past this danger by thinking of creative genius in a different way. She thinks of genius like an elf that lives in the wall, jumping into her head whenever she sits at the computer. Because it is the elf that does the real work, and has the real genius, she is saved from being such a towering egomaniac.

Of course, as she admits, this is not a "different" or even a new way of thinking of genius. It is the old, pre-TED way of thinking about genius. Only the moderns are shallow enough to think that they are responsible for themselves: their minds, their bodies, and their actions. The "ancients," up to the time of, say, Rodin, thought the gods or Muses blessed the artist with his or her ability or inspiration. These pre-Modern artists did not think this way to save themselves from egomania: they really believed it. They really believed that outside forces were at work, that real mystery was involved. If they spoke to these forces or gods or Muses, they did not do it as some sort of psychic joke, to release tension or for other therapeutic reasons: they did it to thank them.

For example, Ms. Gilbert tells us a story about [Tom Waits](#) shouting at the Muses to come back when he is not driving: can't they see that he is busy? This story gets a big laugh, and it is telling in two ways: one, we get to hear from another towering egomaniac phony, Tom Waits, pretending to be a genius. Ms. Gilbert betrays her real level: she thinks Tom Waits is an example of real genius, and so does her audience. They have never considered the possibility that it is not hard to sing bad songs with gravel in your voice, as long as you don't care if you trash your larynx. These are people constitutionally unable to tell the difference between a real artist and a fake artist [[here is a real musical genius](#)], between real art and what Tolstoy called "a simulacrum of art." Two, this story is telling in that we know it is fake: if

the Muses had really been floating over Tom Waits at this point, they would have replied by grabbing the steering wheel and driving the smug bastard over a cliff. I have had moments of inspiration while driving, and you know what I do? I pull over and grab my fucking Big Chief tablet out of the glove compartment and put my hand to my ear. I turn off the radio, roll up the windows, and listen very very carefully. I write it all down verbatim, and then ask humbly if that is all. The Muse knows when and where to arrive: it is not up to me to question these things. Her schedule is a little bit more important than mine, I imagine.

In fact, the Muse is writing this right now. When I first heard Ms. Gilbert's lecture, it didn't offend me much, to be honest. Her voice took me by the balls and caressed me into a state of non-judgment. Unfortunately for her, the Muse overheard the lecture. Erato flew down from her perch upon the roof and roused me from my slumbers and told me to get my fingers loosened up: it was time for another lesson.

The Muse said to me: "Don't you see what a sacrilege it is for this woman to be joking about genius or inspiration, and to be bringing that sack of bagshot Waits into it? I haven't spent a second with either person, and neither have any of my sisters, and I don't like her telling fibs. You haven't yet read her book, but I have, and I can tell you that it takes no large or small amount of genius to write such a book. It takes an advance from a greedy publisher and few months of proper calculation. You ask yourself what the average shallow female most wants to read, and you write it. Do you think the publisher looked at this book proposal and thought, 'wow, this would be a great spiritual quest—well-thought-out, rigorous, real, and likely to bring true transcendence. Let us hope that dear Elizabeth finds herself'? Of course not. The publisher thought, 'wow, this sounds like a cash cow. Oprah will be all over this book like a fat lady on a tub of double-buttered popcorn.' Well, just as the publisher thought, we may assume Ms. Gilbert thought. Look at her subtitle: 'One woman's search for everything.' Does a person on a true spiritual quest subtitle her book something like that? It is offensive to any and all spirits to begin a quest with such demands or desires. Sorry, human female-girl thing, but not even the gods find everything. Even Zeus gets thwarted in his lusts by Hera. Even Bacchus has pains he must drown with wine. Even Demeter loses a crop now and then. Athena gets to wear armor and hunt with beautiful dogs, but she doesn't also get to be Aphrodite. No one gets everything. We Muses do not grant such wishes, nor do we get involved with books with subtitles like that. Only the Fates get involved in such cases, since we are dealing with hubris here. Ms. Gilbert was not seeking inspiration or genius, she was seeking the 'mega-sensation international best seller thing.' She has it, and now we will see how it feeds her soul. We already see her unwinding a bit here onstage, joking about drinking gin in the morning. It is only a matter of time before the joke becomes the JOKE. So, boy, read the book, do some research and then open your ears for another terrible tongue-lashing."

Well, I must admit that my ears are always ready for a tongue-lashing from the lovely Erato, the wetter the better. She is the one lady whose requests I never question, and whose lessons I never regret.

Not only did I read (parts of) the book, I listened to a discussion that lasted almost as long as the book, between Stephen Metcalf, Katie Roiphe, and Julie Turner, at *Slate magazine*. Mr. Metcalf took the side against and the women took the side for the book. Now, I remember Ms. Roiphe fondly for her defense



of men in the 90s, when almost no one else but Camille Paglia and she were doing it (men were, and are, not allowed to defend themselves). But here she doesn't score many points. She defends the book because it is better than *Prozac Nation*, which is like defending Ted Bundy because he didn't eat as many people as Jeffrey Dahmer. She also finds Ms. Gilbert brave, since women always get attacked for writing fluffy self-analysis. Yes, it takes incredible bravery for a writer for *GQ magazine* to dare to write a fluffy bestseller, since now it will be so hard for her to be voted onto the Pantheon with Shakespeare and Dante and Jane Austen. Julie Turner's comments are even less to the point, if possible: she likes the book because Ms. Gilbert ate at some places in Rome at which she also ate. Ms. Turner is only worried that the book will make these places so popular she won't be able to get reservations next time.

Mr. Metcalf clearly hates the book, but he is kept in check by his desire not to appear too Grinchy. Being at a table with two "intellectual" women who like the book, he cannot just come out and say that the book is a horrible piece of effluvium, a pox upon the history of literature, and a measure of all who read it. He reads outloud a few passages with apparent disgust, hoping the words will speak for themselves, but the words don't speak for themselves with the ladies present, who seem unable to contextualize the sentences beyond the periods at the end. They like Ms. Gilbert, for interior reasons of their own, and they will defend her no matter what idiocy she is caught saying in print.

Despite being outnumbered, Mr. Metcalf clearly won the argument, if only because he was the only one who attempted to make some objective and substantive points. But Erato was not at all satisfied with his performance, nonetheless. Ms. Roiphe asked him if his problem was with Ms. Gilbert or with the project in general, and he hedged by saying that someone might have made something of it. But this is false. The project was offensive on the face of it, and neither Isaiah nor Sappho could have done anything with it.

To prove this, let us begin with the backstory. Ms. Gilbert, coming off a nasty divorce, for which she felt some guilt, needed to do some serious soul searching. She had cried herself out on the floors of a thousand bathrooms and now she needed to really answer some questions. She says she had gotten too skinny in her misery and so wanted to put on a few pounds before she hit the ashrams and bamboo mats and the bread and water fasts. So what did she do (and this is our first big clue): She wrote up a book proposal, got an advance, and then went to Italy for four months to pig out on pizza!

Aha! Yes, just what Jesus or the Buddha would have done. You don't want to head for the wilderness until you have gotten your trip underwritten and insured, with a few hundred grand for pocket money and pork, and a guarantee of 15% of profits (not including paperback and movie rights).

Now, Ms. Gilbert's readers don't see it this way, of course. They are pulled in by that whole weight issue thing. She doesn't want to be skinny! She wants to be a big beautiful woman, with rolls of good American fat hanging loosely from her middle, and jiggly triceps, and knees like little balloons. Goodness, that is so liberating!

Yes, we may think of Ms. Gilbert's audience as an audience of Charlotte Hazes (you remember, Lolita's mother?), whom Nabokov skewered thusly:

**She was, obviously, one of those women whose polished words may reflect a book club or a bridge club, or any other deadly conventionality, but never her own soul; women utterly indifferent at heart to the dozen or so possible subjects of a parlor conversation, but very particular about the rules of such conversation, through the sunny cellophane of which not very appetizing frustrations can be readily distinguished.**

And later

**...fat Haze suddenly spoiled everything by turning to me and asking me for a light, and starting a make-believe conversation about a fake book by some popular fraud.**

The legion of Charlotte Hazes who read *Eat, Pray, Love* don't care that it is full of bald inconsistencies, bad advice, temptations to sloth, greed, gluttony, and moral solipsism; they don't care that the only discipline it contains is a shrewd slavery to the reader's every shallow need; they don't care that it flings slights intended and unintended to every god, muse, daemon, and clear thinker in history; they only care that the woman gets fed, burped by hairy gurus, and in the end bedded by a dark Brazilian. This is porn for women, in the guise of a penitent prayer book.

And that is the whole problem. I have no quarrel with fluffy entertainment or porn. Neither I nor any Muse require that any male or female spend the whole day or night in a posture of repentance. If Ms. Gilbert wants to get fed, burped and bedded, with a bestseller to greet her at home, fine, good for her. But for god's sake, deary, don't pretend you are on some spiritual quest, that you have seen God in the pizza, or that you give a rat's ass for meditation. If you prefer writing fluff to meditating, go to it. You will not offend Erato or Buddha or Vishnu or Zeus or Frigga in the least. The offense only comes with the pretense that you are doing what you are not doing. You were clearly *not* pursuing any sort of spirituality, since normally when people go to Rome on a spiritual quest, they don't spend all their time at the cafes, looking for God in the pizza. They spend some time in the museums, or at the Forum, or in the libraries, or in the catacombs, or in the countryside.

If Ms. Gilbert had really been in search of even one truth beyond food and sex, she might have stayed home and re-read her Thoreau. Henry would have told her that "it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things." She could have got that wisdom without reading past the first few pages. Henry is known for importing some Eastern philosophy, but he makes fun of gurus on page 2:

**What I have heard of Brahmins sitting exposed to four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging with their heads suspended, over flames; or looking at the heavens over their shoulders, "until it becomes impossible for them to resume their natural position, while from the twist of the neck nothing but liquids can pass into the stomach"; or dwelling, chained for life, at the foot of a tree; or, measuring with their bodies, like caterpillars, the breadth of vast empires; or standing on one leg on the tops of pillars....**

Ms. Gilbert's entire trip, if not an act of career, was an act of desperation. There is no need to go to Rome for pizza. If you need to put on a few pounds, there is good food to be had in Connecticut or New York City. Other equally clueless people travel tens of thousands of miles from Europe and Asia to gain a few expensive pounds in the restaurants of New York City. The Italians have been good

enough to come live in the Big Apple, even, and they have brought their famous pizzas with them, just for the benefit of rich folks from Waterbury. If God really does hang out in pizza toppings, we must assume he does it worldwide, not just in Rome.

And for meditation, Henry will tell you that you don't have to travel for that either.

**One hastens to South Africa to chase the giraffe, but surely that is not the game he would be after.... Is not our own interior white on the chart, black though it may prove, like the coast, when discovered?**

You would think a writer should know this, since writers are paid to sail their own interior seas. Beyond that, you don't need to go to India to look within. India has not cornered the market in quietude or routes to the holy. All Ms. Gilbert had to do was quit crying in one of those bathrooms, stare instead at the ceiling tiles above her, and stay awhile. No chants or postures are necessary. No candles, no masters, no breathing rates, no mantras, no mandalas, no incense, no drugs, no smoke, no mats, nothing. If the bathroom floor is cold, go to bed and sleep an extra two hours in the morning. It will accomplish the same thing. Your mind will sort itself out, with no conscious help from you. The greatest mistake in becoming holy is *trying* to be holy. Just fucking relax.

In conclusion, I want to return to Ms. Gilbert's TED lecture. She tells us that contemporary artists are unstable because the pressure of their own genius is too much for them. Because they think the genius is in themselves, instead of in the elves in the wall, they can't handle the enormity of it, and they crack up. Or, she says, they crack up because they have one big success and then dry up. The elf gives them one book or painting or song and then flits off. Their glory days behind them, they take to drink and implode.

But once again, Ms. Gilbert has it all wrong. This is not the trajectory of the artist. This is the trajectory of the non-artist. The elves do not leave real artists. The Muse is always on the roof. Fame is not fleeting for artists, since artists don't give a damn about fame. Fame is fleeting for media phenoms, for PR gurus, pop bands and Hollywood stars. These are the people that crack up from not being able to produce the goods anymore. The David Hasselhofs who can't come up with a Baywatch spin-off, the Britneys who can't buy another hit from P-Diddy (since he is selling to younger girls who haven't blown out their bellies or faces yet).

Ms. Gilbert is not talking about "creative people," she is talking about herself. She is not worried for the contemporary artist, in general, she is worried about herself. Can she follow up her hit? Has she peaked? She actually asks herself these questions on stage. I have an answer for her. Who cares? Erato and her sisters have bigger things to push along than the next self-help book for the shallow set. For them, *Eat, Pray, Love* is no peak of anything, so there can be no fall off, no downhill side.

If Ms. Gilbert really had any integrity, she could admit that. She could say to herself, "Hey, I made some money and had some fun. Now is the time to write a real book. I don't have to worry about paying the bills for, say, three hundred years, so now is the time to write something genuine—that is, something that has no popular appeal and no chance of being published. I don't have to care anymore

what the publishers want or what Oprah likes. I can write a real book for real people: which means I will have an audience about the size of Jane Goodall's troop of mountain gorillas.

No, artists don't crack up because the elves are silent. They don't crack up because they can't handle being the font of so much wisdom. They crack up because they have to live in a society of non-artists and fake artists—people who claim to care about art and holiness and depth and subtlety and beauty and transcendence, but really don't. People who will read a mountain of trashy Oprah books but who won't read a page of real literature or poetry or art. People who give lectures on the Muse without ever getting within ten miles of a Muse. People who create lecture series about great ideas, and then invite jugglers and magicians and politicians and economists and administrators and self-help novelists to speak. Artists crack up because they are surrounded by huge piles of awful non-art, promoted to the skies as poignant and thrilling by ever-growing companies of plastic people. They take to drink to soothe their souls from this daily battering by the evermore bold and strident salesmen and saleswomen of the future, selling us a stripped down model of humanity as a form of progress and progressivism. They fall into fatal funks and depressions from a chronic deficiency in beauty and truth. Everywhere the falsehoods are published as novelties while the truth is ignored as a nuisance. Everywhere the monstrosities are exhibited as edifying, while the lovelinesses are ignored as passe.

You will say the real artist has always been a weird minority, damned by the numbers, and this much is true. But at least in the past the artist did not have to countenance the fake artist in his place. Leonardo was the odd man out, in almost all ways, but he did not have to watch Damien Hirst take his place, and steal the very bread from his lips, the wine from his glass. Tolstoy finally quit the field of literature, but that was his own choice. He did not have to watch Jacqueline Suzanne and Louis L'Amour waltz in and replace him as premier novelist, permanently bankrupting him and sending him to work at Walmart. Thoreau never tried very hard to sell books, but at least he didn't have to see Deepak Chopra and Dr. Phil outselling him a thousand to one. Those things hurt, not as a matter of fame or money, but as a matter of influence. Isaiah didn't write for fame or money, but he wouldn't have wanted to see his prophecies ignored in favor of the Celestine Prophecies, or the prophecies of Bill Gates. Why? Because his prophecies were true, from the mouths of the angels, and because Bill Gates is a schmuck who uses Leonardo's drawings to sell computers.

For the individual artists, these unfairnesses are a personal tragedy, but for the culture the tragedy is even greater. In the past, the real artist was often ignored but rarely buried. Think of Van Gogh. Van Gogh, though a personal tragedy of epic proportions, was only a temporary loss to society: he was eventually unearthed. But now the possibility of such a life has been diminished to the point of extinction. Real artists are not just undiscovered now, they are eradicated. Van Gogh, born now, would be born into a world of TED lectures and Getty Center pamphlets and MOMA propaganda and *New York Times* OpEds and *ARTnews* magazines and Vagina Monologues and FoxNews and CNN and Oprah and American Idol and Dancing with the Stars and the whole ubiquitous smorgasbord of shit and shite that passes for contemporary culture. He would be brought up in one of these perpetual kindergartens of agitprop we call public schools, where he could be indoctrinated from the cradle by the Pentagon and the CIA, hanging yellow ribbons every time some soldier farts in the Middle East. He

could graduate from there into some college where the football team gets a billion dollar endowment for free weights, the business school hires three thousand instructors for thirty thousand undergrads, and the humanities department is held in a tent under a tree. He could join the art history department, which places five thousand graduates in administrative jobs throughout the country, or he could join the art department, which is held together by duct tape. In this art department, which has no easels or chairs, he would be left alone of meddling instructors, trying to mold him. Instead, he would be free to blow his nose and scratch his ass to any extent required by his genius.

I hope you can see that it is very unlikely that our little Vincent would be the tragic figure we know and love. No, if he wanted to “make it” in art, he would have to be the faux-tragic fake artist, slouching about in his laceless Doc Martens, pissing in the fire and throwing his feces out the window. Every other month he would kick some cast-off effluvium of his ersatz life into a pile and hit it with the glue gun, then put it in a cardboard box and Fedex it to Gagosian or PaceWildenstein, where they would mount it on an expensive flying trapeze and dangle it from the ceiling, with flashing lights or Tom Waits gargling in the background. One of our TED lecturers could then plug it at the \$6,000 symposium of the clueless, and the market is complete.

This means that while art was rare in the past, it is now endangered. Van Gogh was teetering on the edge of an abyss at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but now he would be leaning on the lip of the black hole. You can teeter away from an abyss, with some luck and effort, but the suction of the black hole is inexorable. The suction of contemporary society—of which the TED lecture is only one hose—has become a hydra-like vacuum, sucking every last possibility of art and beauty and truth into its maw. But you will not hear this fact in any of these consortiums of genius, since the extinction of the artist has been no accident of culture, no committee oversight. These fake geniuses are the beneficiaries of this extinction, and they revel in it. You will see no defense of art at TED, only the subtle grin of the usurper.\*

\*See, for example, [Lee Smolin’s defense of democracy](#) in a lecture that is supposed to be about physics. Science is not democratic, and only a poor thinker would want it to be, just as only a short person would want basketball to be democratic. But Smolin cannot tell his squishy audience this: they do not want to hear that.

# The Fall of the Gallery

*by Miles Mathis*



September 30, 2008

I told another gallery owner\* to fuck off today. Some will think such language is never called for, but I think it is just the right thing in some situations. I had discovered what I had come to learn, which was that she was not someone I wanted to work with, and all that was necessary was that I inform her of that, in the clearest possible terms. I am pretty sure I achieved that.

Although she was in no position to learn anything from our encounter, it may be that some of my readers will be interested to hear it, so I will explain to you exactly what happened. I walked into a local gallery with a painting and a portfolio. I smiled and told the gallery owner my name and then invited her to drop by my studio sometime. She looked a little exasperated from the beginning (although there was no one else in the gallery and she wasn't doing anything on this Monday afternoon), so I tried to warn her. I smiled and said, "I'm not just some local kid." I didn't want to brag or act snooty, so that was my subtle cue for her to get down off her high horse. She missed the cue completely. She began lecturing me. Although I am probably about her age, she assumed I was at least

a generation younger and saw an opportunity to act very superior and important. I showed her the painting, hoping to avert catastrophe, but she looked for only a split second. She said, “Yes, you are very good, so I want to tell you that this isn’t the way to do this. You put me on the spot. You should send me a sheet of slides, like the other artists. That is the right method.” And so on. I said that I understood that many gallery owners had their methods, but I also have mine. I said there was a good reason I was there in person. But she didn’t want to hear it. She began scolding me again, and so I told her off and walked out.

Many people will think the problem was mine. If I want to work with galleries, I should abide by their rules. But that is to assume that the gallery gets to make the rules in the art world. I don’t live by that assumption. The relationship between the gallery and the artist is supposed to be a partnership, not a master/slave relationship. I consider it a very bad sign when any gallery makes a list of rules for submission. It means they consider themselves the experts on everything, and the artist is just a petitioner to a king. I encounter this situation very often, and this is not the first gallery owner I have told to fuck off.



*an artist with his gallery owner*

The problem is not mine, although I admit that I have to deal with it. The problem belongs to the gallery and it affects them in many ways--although they are not aware of it. They are too busy basking in their own power while the gallery is open, and when the gallery fails, they assume it is the market's fault or the artists' fault. But it isn't. The fault is their own, and it consists in their ubiquitous lack of knowledge about anything to do with art and their conspicuous ignorance of their own ignorance. And it isn't just an ignorance about art, it is an ignorance about how to get along with people. A gallery owner might be expected to know less about art than artists, but you would expect a gallery owner to at least have some social skills. But no, all they normally have is a desire for easy money and a self-assurance based on absolutely nothing but the walls around them (which they have rented).

The first mistake these gallery owners make is in assuming that they can judge art from slides or photos. They can't. It is impossible even for top artists to judge art from slides or photos, and we have much keener eyes than gallery owners. To request slides is ridiculous in this day and age, considering that the quality of slides, although it has always been poor, is now awful. The quality of slide film has crashed in the last two decades, and one supposes that Kodak and Fuji are now making it out of discarded Saran Wrap. It is doubtful that slide film will even be available next year, or the next. I stopped using it long ago.

Although prints are now much better than slides, they still are just prints. They aren't even as good as web images. With web images you can adjust contrast more easily, but with prints there is only so much you can do. A print is always going to add a lot of contrast. I try to tell people, "Look, this is art we are dealing with. These are paintings, not photographs. You can't photograph paintings. It is impossible. You should always judge art from art." But no one will listen. They think they know more than I do, although I think if they knew more than I do, they would be a better artist, no?

Size is another problem. You can't judge a six-foot painting from a 2-inch slide. What these gallery owners do is hold up a full sheet of slides to the light, and then move on to the next sheet. I have seen them do it. Not one in a thousand ever puts a slide in a projector, not even a little hand-held 3X projector. So I refuse to send them slides. They get huffy and start blustering about how they have been in the business twenty years and know how to look at slides, blah, blah. But I don't buy it for a second. I don't care if they have been in the business since the time of Solomon. I don't want to hear a lot of fake horn-tooting. There is no way to judge a painting from a 2-inch slide and that is all there is to it. If they are doing that, they are very poor judges of art, period.

Gallery owners are generally very poor judges of art for a million other reasons, but judging from slides would be the easiest to correct. The fact that they won't even correct that error means that most of them are beyond help or reason.

A majority of galleries won't consider web images, although that is by far the best way to do it now, if they won't travel to artists' studios. God knows why they can't look at web images or take links to artists' sites. One supposes it has something to do with convenience, with bowing to all their disabilities. They don't know how to use a computer or something, I don't know. You can't tell much from web images, even really good ones, since they aren't the right size and don't glow right and so on.



But at least you don't have to use a lot of toxic developing fluid or waste energy trucking portfolios all over the world or fool with return postage of any of that mess. We are not supposed to inconvenience the galleries, since they are so important, but they can inconvenience us no end with all their illogical requirements.

What these gallery owners should do is visit artists' studios. It is so obvious it is hard to believe I have to say it. That is what galleries used to do, you know, back when art was still healthy, say in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You will say it is because slides weren't available, but that isn't it. The reason is because most galleries dealt with local artists. A London gallery worked with English artists, for the most part, for instance, and France was only across the channel. These gallery owners were interested enough in art that they actually *wanted* to travel to see new paintings. If you had offered them slides, they would have refused.

But that doesn't even apply here. In my case, all this gallery owner had to do is drive two blocks in her Lexus. All she had to do is treat me with a minimal amount of courtesy in the beginning. The argument for requiring photos from distant artists is weak; for local artists it is non-existent.

I consider it a sad commentary on the art market when a gallery owner is not interested in art. This is just me, but if I were a gallery owner, I would be interested in seeing all the good art I could, even the art that wouldn't fit into my gallery. Especially regarding artists in the city, I would like to know what is going on; I wouldn't want to miss anything. That is why I go to museums, for one thing. A gallery owner should be part of the artistic community: she should not feel that talking to artists is being "put on the spot." Furthermore, if I were a gallery owner sitting alone in my gallery day after day, I would welcome the opportunity to meet new people. It is called PR. Beyond that, if I were a middle-aged male (which I am) I would especially welcome an attractive, well-dressed, well spoken woman who came in carrying a lovely painting. Even if I couldn't fit her into my gallery, I certainly wouldn't jump down her throat and make her feel uncomfortable in fifty different ways. If I couldn't take her on, I would say why.

These galleries really make artists feel like second class citizens, and I have to believe they do it on purpose. It is a power struggle. We can't be seen coming in the front door, thinking we can talk to the gallery owner like an equal. We need to come in the back door and wipe our feet, or better yet, present a notarized petition and perhaps we will be given permission to send in mail, if it is in the proper form. I am constantly amazed at the levels of presumption exhibited by galleries. When a client comes in, the gallery owners act like dogs, leaping and whining and pissing themselves with anticipation; but when an artist comes in, they dry up completely. In a fair world, an artist would be treated like manna from heaven, since that is what we are to the gallery. Where would the gallery be without artists? Instead, we are treated like plague carriers or rent collectors.

What about her argument that I was putting her on the spot? More bluster. I wasn't putting her on the spot at all. I came when no one else was there, and I was not asking for an immediate decision. That is what the invitation to my studio was for. She could come by at her convenience, look around, leave, and then contact me later as it suited her, by email if she found me really scary. I don't see any spot that

she is on. It is her job to field new talent. Notice that she didn't say, "We aren't taking anyone." If she had said that and I had insisted, then I would be putting her on the spot. But that isn't what happened.

What she should have done, and what I expected she *would* do, is to ask me a few quick questions. She would want to make sure I was an established artist, not some local beginner, which is why I brought the painting and told her I was not a local beginner. She would want to make sure my work was in her line, and again, that is why I brought the painting (as well as some photos in my briefcase). She would want to see that I was in line with her other prices. That is why I had a resume. I don't expect her to want to visit every studio in town, but if a polite and presentable local artist comes in who would fit into her gallery, she should take the time to consider him. I could be the greatest painter in the world, for all she knows. I can see why she would be eager to weed out unpromising people, but scolding everyone who walks in the door is not the way to achieve that. Nor is making up rules. Supposing that the greatest painter in the world happened to be considering her gallery, do you think he or she would want to be treated like a flunky, like some child who needed a lecture?

If anyone needs a lecture or a serious scolding it is these tight-assed gallery owners. They have already done immeasurable harm to art, and they only look to do more. They always respond by saying something like, "You must think a lot of yourself, writing things like this!" Bah! More bluster. Who must think more of himself, the artist who scolds the gallery owner after the gallery owner has made a huge fool of herself, or the gallery owner who scolds the artist as soon as he walks in the door? How much misplaced self-regard does it take to start talking down to someone you don't even know? Leonardo could have walked through her door and she would have started giving him advice and telling him the rules. Don't talk to me about immodesty!

Now, I realize that I don't come off as the most modest person in the world in these writings. I don't intend to. But my problem in art gallery situations is too much modesty, not too little. I absolutely guarantee you that one of the reasons she thought she could take that position with me is that I walked in smiling and tried to be polite. I didn't let rip some long-winded yarn about how great I was and who I knew and how many paintings I had sold and so on. I quietly showed her one painting and invited her to my studio. Also deadly was the fact that she had seen me on my bicycle a couple of days earlier, when I came in the first time to look around. No one who thought a lot of himself--no one you were required to think a lot of--would be seen on a bicycle. Can you see John Currin touring around town on a bicycle? An expensive Harley, maybe, at 200 decibels and with enough chrome to choke the East River, but never a bicycle.

No, if I absolutely have to do things this way, in person, I would be much better off coming in with a couple of gorgeous long-legged models, all of us smoking brown cigarillos. I should park my Ferrari SUV over the curb, almost in the gallery garden, get out of it very slowly, making sure my Tag Heuer was visible as I closed the door. We should look at the other art like it smelled of urine, and the girls should laugh loudly at some unknown joke. That is what impresses these fake gallery people. All style and no substance. In this regard, the realist gallery is just as bad as the avant gallery.

I also find it amusing that she kept telling me that my art was very good, while she was scolding me. I wanted to say, “Yes, I know it is good, but I didn’t come in here for a critique. I don’t care what you think of my art. My only concern is whether you think you can sell it. If I want a critique or an opinion on art, I will go to a better artist. I sure as hell don’t go to a gallery to find out how good my art is.”

I have had many gallery owners start on this line. Sometimes they will take you on and then after a few months they will try to unload a critique on you. You should be painting different subjects or with different colors or with more stuff in the background or something. I look at them in amazement. I want to say, “Hey, if you can’t sell my paintings, just say so. I won’t blame you. You did your best, as far as I know. But don’t give me any advice, please. When I start taking artistic advice from salespeople, you can shoot me.”

Gallery people, like other *soi-disant* arts professionals, work under the shadow of a grave misconception. I am reminded of a magazine editor, whom I quote in my [letters to the editor](#), saying that she was “responsible for directing our artistic future.” What in the name of all that is holy makes her think she is qualified to do that? These pathetic people insert themselves into a field they know abstractly, if at all, based on no qualifications except that they have an art history degree or a pocket full of dirty money, and immediately start giving directions. And they give directions to artists! If anyone should logically be directing our artistic future, it is artists. And that is the reality of the situation, once you sweep past all this bluster. It is the artists who are making memorable paintings who are our artistic present and future. The paintings are the facts and artifacts, not any receipts or financial transactions. These artists also teach younger artists, which is our artistic future in a nutshell. Critics and gallery owners and magazine editors vastly overrate themselves. They accuse me of lacking humility, but who is going to remember a critic or gallery owner in few years? Can you name a gallery owner from any other century?

The gallery owner should see him or herself as a liaison or link, not as a judge or jury or director. Given an artist, a client, and a gallery, the gallery is the *least* important entity in the long term. An uppity gallery should be shunned by both client and artist, and the only reason such galleries aren’t shunned is that the artist and client do not communicate anymore. The gallery has made very sure of that.

No doubt this gallery owner will say, “Well, my dear, I did look at your painting, and I could tell immediately that it wasn’t any good. I said you were good because I wanted to get you out of there. I am not losing anything from this.” That must sting, right? That a non-artist should look at one painting for .27 seconds and dismiss me. Ouch! All the gallery owners in the world could look at all my paintings in person for hours on end, and then dismiss me as an utter failure and child molester, and it would affect me as much as a mosquito bite. Less. The mosquito at least knows what he is doing. A mosquito must have some qualifications to achieve mosquitohood. Surely God gives them some test on biting and buzzing. Who can say as much for a gallery owner? No, they buzz and bite without oversight.

Now, not all gallery owners are such complete assholes. I have found a few who are well-educated and polite. They don’t have a superiority complex when it comes to dealing with artists. A couple of my

galleries contacted me, to start the relationship, and a couple welcomed me when I walked in unannounced. I don't think any of the galleries I work with have a rulebook posted on how new artists should contact them. Greenhouse Gallery now has a very offensive list of rules, but they didn't when I used to work with them. I don't remember how I met them, but I am pretty sure I didn't have to fall down and anoint their feet with lavender and myrrh.

This superior attitude affects art; this lack of knowledge affects art; and this upside-down hierarchy affects art. It affects it, first of all, by loading the galleries with inferior art. Inferior judges choose inferior art. The first hurdle of this problem could be leapt by ditching slides, but the galleries haven't even gotten that far. The art in the galleries *looks like* art that was chosen by slide. It is that obvious to someone with an eye. It is art that lacks all subtlety. What kind of subtlety can you see in a two-inch image, through a mylar sheet, held up to a distant light? What kind of deep emotion is going to infect you from a colored smudge the size of a frito? All you can see is a broad indication of color and a broad indication of composing, and that is what 99% of realism now is. The other painters in this gallery today had some talent, or I would not have been there, but they all fell into this category categorically. They had learned a respectable amount of technique somewhere in some way, but they had not found a real subject. The modern realist painting tends to be some big head or body, painted realistically, couched in some big jungle of drips and color fields, with maybe a real piece of cloth glued in and painted over, or maybe some other oddity welded on and blinking. The modern realist painting generally tells you three things, in very clear terms: 1) I, the artist, can paint figures. I am talented. 2) I, the artist, am modern. That is why I have done these clever things like drip paint or add foreign objects. I know who Anselm Kiefer is, and I have been to the big city. 3) I, the artist as artist in a realist gallery, know that you want this painting to look good in the living room. That is why I have not been too weird and why my painting looks like a color-field landscape, if you squint.

The reason I choose to go into the gallery in person when I can is not to break the rules or bother the owner; it is because I know my art suffers from photography. And, yes, it seems to suffer more than the sort of modern realism that is created specifically to appeal to gallery owners looking at slides. My art does not make use of bright colors or drips or color fields or foreign objects glued onto the canvas or by background energy or by other modern tricks. My art is simple in subject and composition and subtle in color and emotion. This is not just my opinion. Other gallery owners have actually told me this. This gallery owner today recommended I send slides. Other galleries I have worked with have recommended I never use slides or photos. One said, "I thought you were very mediocre until I saw your work in person. Your paintings have a weird quality, one I have never really come across: photography completely devours them."\*\*

Imagine how much real art has been overlooked through the mylar sheet, by the mylar-brained gallery owners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Imagine how boring a Vermeer or a Chardin or a Corot would look as a two-inch smudge, held up to a fluorescent overhead light. That is also why you almost never see any drawings in modern galleries. A charcoal or pencil drawing is at an immediate disadvantage in a slide sheet. It cannot compete. A drawing is all about subtlety, and the modern gallery has done with that long ago.

This has been going on long enough to completely bastardize the entire field. Most artists in my position can't or won't fight back. They are forced to take the market and the gallery on its terms. Not only do they agree to send in slides, they agree (subconsciously, perhaps) to paint the sort of paintings that look good in slides. To impress a certain sort of person who is judging in a certain way, there are certain things you do to increase your chances. You use a lot of color, you have a lot of "energy" in the painting, and you choose subjects that have a built-in explanation. You don't want anything subtle in the painting, since that won't come through. You don't want anything that isn't immediately recognizable as modern and edgy. You don't want anything that is ambiguous. Purposely messy and meaningless, yes; but ambiguous, no. You should give a lot of ham-handed psychological clues, of the sort the modern person is used to seeing, of the sort that can be seen at two inches or two miles; but you shouldn't have your figures actually feeling anything themselves. That is strictly old-school.

Another problem is the fact that these artists are chosen on their lack of demands. All the artists who have any subtlety are weeded out first, via slides and other illogical methods of judging. Then, in a second round, all artists who are capable of taking offense are weeded out. The gallery owner treats them like stupid children: if they can take it, they make it to the next round. If they can't, they don't make it. After three rounds of this, you have removed all the wheat and you are left with only the chaff. You have a gallery full of spineless artists who will prostitute themselves to the market, whatever it happens to be.



*the artist takes his gallery for a ride\*\*\**

What amazes me is that the galleries still seem to find clients by this method. A large percentage of them go out of business fairly soon, and many stay open only with a constant input of money from the rich owner. But a great number of paintings still sell. You see them in people's homes.

Many or most people don't seem to notice the complete lack of subtlety or the high levels of phony and clunky tricks and "statements." The only advice on art they ever get comes from the gallery owner or director or salesperson, so of course they would be expected to share the same faults. The client learns to look at a painting the way the gallery owner does, as if it is a two-inch slide viewed through mylar, held up to a fluorescent light. A color-field blob with an emotive aura to it. An expensive thing over the sofa that means something, I forget what, but the artist is from Argentina or Cuba or Outer Mongolia. He has dreads and a funny name, and practices voodoo, and has a very interesting two-headed wife. Her picture is taped to the back of the canvas!

Addendum: This gallery soon failed. It is no longer in Taos.

\**A Muse Gallery*, Taos and Columbus, Ohio. I recommend all artists and clients avoid this gallery and any other gallery that posts a list of rules for submitting artists on its website. Also, if you see a gallery owner holding up slide sheets to the light, run for the door. Off the top of my head, I give you John Pence in San Francisco, Baczek Gallery in Northampton, MA, Michelson Galleries in Northampton, Meyer Gallery, Santa Fe, and Downey Gallery, Santa Fe, as places to be shunned. They have treated me with condescension and contempt and so I return the favor.

\*\*George Attal, *Austin Galleries*, 1996.

\*\*\*photo by Jeremy Ginsberg

# Conversations at Goodart

*by Miles Mathis*



*by Tim Tyler*

For those who don't know, Goodart is a listserv (an online discussion) that is allied to ARC. Begun by Brian Yoder, it is now an informal roundtable whose membership varies widely. Fred Ross is probably the central figure. Brian is still the moderator and he also posts pretty heavily. Almost all posters are realists, though not all are allied to ARC. The non-allied posters often tend to run into trouble eventually. Many have been banned. I posted often a couple of years ago, when I was just getting online. Once I started writing for ARC I quit posting. My recent reviews of New Realism and the

ARC Salon have generated a lot of letters from the realist establishment, and so I thought I would return to Goodart to put myself back in the middle of it, to lower myself into the Lion's Den, as it were.

I have received a surprising number of positive responses to recent articles, not just from artists I praised but from artists and non-artists who agree with my wider contention. However, I have to admit that, as expected, I have gotten a fair amount of mail from people who are "aghast" that I would presume to attack my elders—people who out-earn me and have painted princesses and presidents and so forth. These writers are sure that I am just jealous, that I am munching on sour grapes, that my greatest secret desire is to paint or sleep with Cher or Prince William or somebody. These people will no doubt find this article another example of my denial. However, some may learn something of use from it, others may get a laugh, others may be offended enough to get off their duff for one reason or another—in which case my time has not been wasted.

Tim Tyler was good enough to step forward as first representative of the opposing camp. If I wanted to air the differences between myself and the status quo in realism, Tim was prepared to oblige me. As a lead-in, I will remind the reader that I criticized Tim's painting *The Deconstructionist* in the ARC Salon Review for its political content, a content I found mainly gratuitous. This was Tim's reply:

TT: As to critical analysis; a Goodart member just wrote me privately to suggest Miles would do well to spend more time being critical of his own work. How long would such a discussion take? Abuse of phthalos would be where I would begin.

Did you all get that Miles considers himself the Michael Jordan of art? Look for his Nike shoe line anyway.

Any of us would have chosen different winners because we are human. But not all artists are whiners and poor losers. Miles would be wise to paint more and write less if he ever wishes to paint well. [Tim then compares my critique of him to Walter Sickert's critiques of Sargent].

MM: I never suggested I was the Michael Jordan of painting and I rarely use phthalos. I use ultramarine and cobalt blues only. My standard green is green earth, although I do use Chromium Oxide and Perm Green occasionally to boost my spectrum. It's funny, because most of the colorists seem to think I don't use enough color—that I am too brown and gray. Tim apparently thinks I use too much color, since phthalos are famously powerful. I do push my tones toward the blue a bit, mostly by using yellow sparingly. I also like brown and gray. But this is a conscious choice, because it subtly accentuates the mood I want to accentuate. It is not because I don't know how to handle color. If Tim doesn't like this, that is his prerogative. But notice that Tim is critiquing me on narrow technical matters, whereas I said nothing about his technique. I commented on his subject matter, the politics of it. I stand by my assessment, an assessment that would not be affected by seeing the work in person: in person, the technique might be better or worse, but the subject matter would not be affected.



[As for being a "poor loser", I remind my readers that I didn't enter the competition. I wrote as an observer, not a participant.]

As for comparing me to Sickert, the comparison is really a stretch. My work looks nothing like Sickert's. In fact, most people have complained that, if anything, my brushwork is too Sargent, a complaint I have, in part, accepted. After an initial love affair with Sargent I have been moving away from him for at least ten years, trying to regain some of the strengths of Van Dyck or Titian or even the 19th century Russians. This is not to say that I think I am on the level of any of these people, Sargent included. But I no longer judge Sargent or myself or anyone else primarily on paint handling or technique. In using the Sickert/Sargent analogy, it is Tim who is comparing himself to Sargent. If Tim thinks he is Sargent to my Sickert, I suggest he is not really paying attention.

As far as my comments being from web images, while the ARC judging was done from slides, I don't see a big difference there. Slides are a bit better than web images, yes, but the difference is nothing compared to the difference between slides and life. I am glad that Fred is happy with his purchases now that he has them in hand, but there is no amount of technical difference that would change my opinion of them, since my comments were all on subject matter and treatment, not on color or brushwork or other technical matters. There is no amount of technique that would change my opinion of *Two Worlds*. As for my only liking work like my own, that is simply not true. I gave much higher awards to Daniel Greene than ARC did, although Greene is tight. His still life is very tight and very unlike anything I have done or would do. Nancy Fletcher's drawing is also quite tight and nothing like my own treatment would be. Faraut's sculptures are all tightly rendered, unlike my own or unlike, say, Rodin. In fact, I critique both Gerhartz and Oxborough for sometimes being too loose. If you reread my review, you can see that almost all my comments are on subject matter and treatment and not on technique. Another example is Aron Wiesenfeld, whose work is not like mine. What did I praise him for? His mood.

TT: Lets talk about design for a moment; <http://www.mileswmathis.com/liebe.html>

Can't you see how terrible this tree is for your design?



MM: Let's talk about not digging your hole any deeper. Your arrows are badly misaimed. That tree is the hook of the whole composition. Without it, not only would the couple slide off into the water, but the painting would lack several key elements. 1) the tree is acts as a foreground that gives the painting depth. In such a large horizontal with no sky, you need a hook in the foreground to keep the painting from being just one big middle-ground. It is part of the illusion of depth. 2) With the other tree and the figures and the sword, a rolling Z (or M, I guess) is formed that helps move the eye back to the focus. The eye first hits the heads. The tree helps force them to go from there to the hands—instead of to the naked butt, which is where they would go without a caesura in the middle of the bodies. Eventually the eye wanders up to the naughty bits anyway, since you can't keep the eyes off that area indefinitely. Since the bodies aren't painted with a lot of focus, you then wander left to the sword and the left side of the painting. That tilting tree pushes you back to the middle, through the line of the sword and the bodies, back to the faces. Take out the main tree or move it to the right and you have a much weaker composition. The Z doesn't work with the right arm, for one thing. We have three "mountains" in the main line of movement, and this is a large part of the linear harmony of the work.

TT: Nah....I don't buy it. Youth is good for athletes, it's hard on writers and painters. This is the time to learn, study and listen. The words from young mouths often sound pompous to everyone but their authors. You are a better wordsmith than painter, but like Sickert, I keep coming back to your work and it undermines your writing. You really need to study the art of painting ASAP and stop trying to sound as if you know about this complex subject. Your two figures, in large part due to the green tones, look as if they've been there for several days. I expect that was not your intention when you began. Let your ego go and study or else you'll end up a bitter old grumbling "could have been", it's not too late. Enter shows, win shows, get your work on <http://www.Askart.com>. You might want to check the prices being earned by the artists (there) before you presume to appraise. You will also need to establish yourself so

that when someone does a google on you stuff pops up. A resume, associations, collectors, awards etc., these are all better than defensive explanations of your design. The above composition is a classic "tennis match design" by the way (this is taught in art school)... the tree is the net. Another term for this is a "swinging gate." Sickert wouldn't have known this either, but he and you should know this before dictating to others.

[At this point one of the Goodart regulars, Mike, posted this: Tim, excuse me for butting in, but I find this thread very perplexing. If Miles is a "babe in the woods", as you imply, he is a babe in the woods of the ARC living masters section. Searching his work on that site, and on his own also, one finds some very recent editions—one a very, very beautiful drawing. So color me confused, or am I smelling something personal?]

MM: Mike, Tim is mad because I said on my own site that I didn't particularly like his painting *Deconstruction*. I didn't mention any technical matters at all, just said that I thought the subject matter was political and therefore offensive to me for all the old reasons, which I have written about on ARC and my own site until everyone wishes I would just die. I am not going to die, though. I am going to keep at it until someone sees my point. I have nothing against Tim personally and did not mention *Deconstruction* to rankle Tim, although I can understand why he is rankled. I like some of Tim's paintings—the little girl with the jug to name one. I seem to remember some phthalo in the background of that painting, but it didn't matter to me since it worked, whatever it was. (That viridian shawl may have some phthalo in it too, since most cool modern greens are phthalos. But whatever.) I saw the painting in person at Fred's house. It looked just as good in person as on the web. I am thrilled to see Tim paint more and more figures, since everyone knows I have a hard heart toward most still life. I am also happy to see Tim or any other realist have success—teaching, money, or otherwise. We all certainly deserve it more than the phonies in the avant garde. However, I have the right to my opinion, not as the Michael Jordan of painting but simply as a working artist in the field who cares about the integrity of the field and the direction it is taking. If Tim needs to hate me for a while, that is to be expected. But I don't really see the point of his now fishing in my portfolio for errors to throw in my face. I was not fishing in his portfolio trying to be nasty. Circumstance dictated it. I commented on a lot of other stuff besides *Deconstruction*. The main reason Tim should take a beat is that offering up complaints against me willynilly is not working for him. I have lots of weaknesses and would love to help him out, but he is not really finding them. Taking on *Tristan and Isolde* was a bad leading move, since he has done nothing comparable. Once he attempts a life-size double nude out of doors in dappled light at dusk, with blood and a creative storyline and so on, then he can tell me how I mucked it up. His opinion that I should write less and paint more is also odd coming from someone who has the time for 10,000 posts a year at Goodart. Tim can use his time as he sees fit, as can I. My gallery at my own site is bursting with work old and new. I haven't seen any other major realist on the web who has posted so many works, period. For the record, I have done six oils and eight drawings this year to date. Several of these are already posted on my site. I don't work blindly fast. In fact I work slower now than I use

to, and not because I am old and blind. It is because I am often tighter than I used to be and because I am constantly trying new things. I get all these things done not because I have a cookie cutter method (as Tim has accused Pino of having, probably rightly). I get them done because I do not teach or have a family. It is just the way things have worked out with me, for better or for worse. I have a lot of hours in the day to fill, and some of them are devoted to art, some to science, and some to being the most hated man in America. All are equally dear to my heart.

TT: Your two figures [*Tristan and Isolde*], in large part due to the green tones, look as if they've been there for several days. I expect that was not your intention when you began.

MM: I'm sorry Tim, but have you seen the painting in real life? I ask because I have been careful to limit my comments to matters of design and subject matter. You are now judging subtle colors in a very large painting based on a webimage. But anyway, these two are not supposed to look their best. Go dump all your blood in a stream and see how spry you look. They are also underneath trees, which any idiot knows reflect light down. I have heard the same sort of complaints about my Shelley Altarpiece. I guess you "clean color" guys would recommend that Matthias Grunewald send his Jesus to the salon and hairdresser before putting him on that nasty old cross, or that Van Dyck liven up his sitters with a couple of weeks under the sunlamp.

As for Askart.com, etc, what does all this have to do with painting? It looks like PR to my eyes. So I am short on smiley PR? I really could take lessons on that from you, but I think I'll pass. Do you think it was an oversight that I didn't set up my own site as a sales and PR site? That I don't join the clubs and slap the backs? If that is what you were looking for when you became an artist then you have found it. Congrats. It is not what I am looking for. I am looking for creative freedom and a few knowledgeable clients. These clients aren't hanging around at Askart.com or at OPA shows. I have won major awards and they don't mean anything. In fact they usually spell bad news because you end up painting what you think the judges want. Sound familiar?

TT: By the way, one of your loyal readers sent me your long treatise and was aghast to read it.

MM: Good, I love it most when people are "aghast". Just so you know, no article I have written has generated so much positive mail, including my big ARC articles. I am making many new contacts here in Europe with people who didn't understand where I was coming from with the ARC alliance. They had thought I was X, but now I am Y. I didn't see it coming, and it was no outcome of PR, but it is nice anyway. It is also funny that the realists I complimented seem to have no problem with me being outspoken. None of them has been offended at my presumption in writing about ARC or my fellow artists. If you compliment someone, they love you, if you don't they hate you. It is really that simple, and all the rest is just posturing. I am very far from being alone in my opinion of *Deconstruction*, too, if

that means anything to you (not that it should). If you believe in the painting and really think that I am just a grumpy loser with no eye and no future, then why take offense?

TT: Miles, I recall the Southerners whimpering after the Civil War when the damn yankees ruined their fields and homes. The South always seemed to forget who fired the first shot.

MM: I know I fired the first shot. I intended to fire the first shot. And I hit my target, as I know from your dying screams. You don't know where my field and home is, or my heart. It is unlikely you could hit something you can't possibly see.

I intended to attack all the art wonks who have taken over realism. The wonks who are in love with their little rules. Their creative reach is defined by learning rules and enforcing rules. You have been good enough to continue to prove my point, with your choice of dying salvos. You bring up my composition, I educate you at great length on composition, and all you can do is quote some dwarfish rule you learned in school about tennis nets. You don't even bother to apply the rule to my painting, you just mention it as if an aside to the code is enough to send me running. New realism is full of these tight-assed rules, rules apparently made up since the invention of fuzzy tennis balls, since none of the old masters bothered with them. Similar rules concern "clean color" and not smudging your pastels and not using black and so on and on. The clean color and not using black rules are promulgated by Sargent lovers, who fail to notice that Sargent relied on black, admitted he relied on black, who was not a clean colorist or a colorist at all, who used lots of muddy colors and browns and greys, and greyed out his colors, and so on. If you put a Sargent or a Velasquez or even a Sorolla next to a Gerhartz (loose) or Shanks (tight), the former would look very drab.

The pastellists who forbid smudging also canonize Degas, who smudged and broke all of their other wonkish little rules. They tried to give Aaron Shikler an award, Shikler who smudges and does whatever he likes, and he didn't even have time for them.

The problem is that these tiny people and their little artshow rules have taken over New Realism. They are absolutely incapable of looking at a painting as a painting. They only see the paint. Tim is their spokesperson for the moment. He is good enough to put it up for the record. I have long known that I was dismissed for these asinine reasons. So it is time to air it out.

All these people are artistically very limited and must be confronted head-on. They quite simply do not know what they are talking about. Tim thinks he is Sargent to my Sickert? Tim hasn't got any noticeable brushwork at all, how could it begin to be expressive. Tim, you aren't like Sargent in any conceivable way. You are trying to make up for a complete lack of expression with color and politics. You avoid compositional errors by having no composition at all. A single figure may have minimal composition, but it must make up for that with expression. You have a girl with no expression in a box. So you also have no design and no composition. All you have is a title.

All the southwest landscapers and still lifers are just playing with paint. They are obsessed with technique—usually loose oily paint—but they don't even have much technique. They have no subject. It is just pretty paint that almost mimics a mountain or a cloud or something. The emotional content is zero.

The figurative artists aren't much better. They have chosen to believe Schmid or Leffel or Shanks instead of the old masters; they put their trust in wonks who tell them that design and color are everything, that edges are the thing, that the paint should be edible, and other ridiculous verbiage. If anyone is aghast at my recent articles, you can be sure it is not because I am attacking the great Tim Tyler. They are aghast because I am attacking Schmid and Shanks and Leffel and the big boys. They see me burning my precious bridges, my links to the all important markets. What they don't understand is that I never had any possible links to those markets, since those markets are defined by wonkism. They are defined and controlled by technical careerists, the workshop cabana boys. My only hope in that direction was to begin to accept their rules, to begin turning out glitzy high-colored empty things.

These artists always mention Sargent and Rembrandt and Velasquez and the Russians (Repin, Shishkin, Serov, Fechin) and so on, but their work has nothing in common with these real artists. These artists had great subjects and high emotional content. Even their technique differs in most important ways. None of these great artists keyed up their colors gratuitously or let design or brushwork overwhelm the subject. Even Sargent and Fechin weren't technically obsessed the way the New Realists are. Sargent had lots of brushwork that wasn't overanalyzed. He had lots of passages that were just scribbled in. Not scribbled in self-consciously, so that even the scribbles look planned out beforehand, but just put in any old way. What Sargent understood is that if the whole painting is equally beautiful (in brushwork say) then no part will have a proper focus. You must have beautiful paint on top of (truly) messy paint. Then the beautiful paint has a proper foil. Schmid never learned this. For him, every stroke must be delicious. This is precisely what causes the saccharine effect, an effect that has become endemic in New Realism.

The New Realists have over-refined their work. They are the most technically obsessed artists in the history of the world, way beyond Bouguereau and the 19th century academics. I suppose this is a reaction to the complete slop of the avant garde. But I am always surprised at how relatively simple the old work is. A Van Dyck is soporific compared to a Shanks. A Van Dyck has almost no color, almost no edges, his warms and cools are ignored or upside down (upside down would mean here that the whites are warmer than the darks), and yet he is a thousand times deeper and richer than Shanks. The Realists would be smart to study why this is. It is because Van Dyck invested his figures with emotion. Not with technical tricks, but by choosing models, settings and poses that generated subtle emotion, and then by filling the gaps with his own grace. Van Dyck could make a boring person look interesting. The new realists make even interesting people look boring. I am not sure you can teach grace, but you should at least be capable of seeing it when someone else has it. Otherwise you are just a brick in the wall.

TT: Miles you are going forth with more errors. Where did I once say "rules"? Several of my students read this forum and will tell you I don't teach rules. You really must read more than you write.

Brevity is the soul of wit. Surely you've heard that? Also less is more. Must I teach you how to write too? I'm not even going to read that lengthy tirade.

MM: First Tim is Sargent and now he is Wilde. The man doesn't know when he is beaten. Although the refusal to read my posts is a clue in that direction. But please, Tim, I am sure the world would love to see you teach me to write. I beg you to go on. Dig, dig my love. BTW, dying badly is not always considered good press. I definitely will publish your comments as widely as I can. You will be immortalized with Tom Taylor and Harry Quilter, lucky boy.

TT: Oh Miles, by the way, please keep talking about my art everywhere you can. My hits go up and I get students and make CD sales every time.

MM: Yes, you will be rich and I will be good and we will both have what we want. It's a sunny world after all.

I ended the conversation here. One of the Goodart exes wrote me during the skirmish asking if I could concentrate on painting while these things were going on. He didn't think he could. I said I was a bit like McEnroe, in that I used it all as motivation. I did start the fight after all, so I have nothing to complain about. He said that my arguing with Tim Tyler was like McEnroe playing Bobby Riggs, Riggs wearing a corset and high heels. Maybe, but these matches have to be played out sometimes, or the world forgets what tennis really is.

Besides, it is clear that Tim just got in the way of fire intended for higher up. Tim is just a second generation student of Schmid or Leffel or Shanks or someone like that. It is the Portrait Societies and the OPA's and the American Artist magazines and all the institutionalized wonkdom that is the real problem. Pastel Societies that promote bright colors and smudge-proof plastic gloves and ventilators and workshops on the cape and metal-legged portable easels. New Schools that teach the old religion by bringing back cast drawings and mannequins and portraits of vases. Bloated master-painters who treat every head like a portrait of a vase or a gourd with eyes. Experts who think that grapes are highly expressive or that toy dolls are poignant subjects. Daring adventurers who draw from the nude but are allergic to pubic hair or penises or open eyes, who think that a woman showing her back is nude.

I am sure these people think that ignoring me will solve all their problems, but I am not going away. I don't accept their rules or their world and never will. I am the worst nightmare of the avant garde and the wonks both, and they had better get out the sandbags. We are in for stormy weather.

In the spirit of ARC (which I have not given up on, by the way—someone informed me that a few are dismissing this whole flap as a "bad divorce" between me and Fred. But my firing from ARC did not cause this most recent move from me, it simply allowed it to happen. While I was at ARC, I was encouraged to focus on the avant garde, which I was happy to do for a while. Now I am more focused on the New Realists. As ARC helps realism to pick up steam, the danger from the wonks increases, if only because the wonks are the status quo of realism. But ARC is far from being wholly allied to mainstream realism. ARC is still in philosophical formation. Many of its theories are set in stone, some might say, but I believe that most of these concern its position regarding the 19th century, Bouguereau, opposition to the avant garde, opposition to Hockney, etc. ARC's position regarding contemporary realism is in flux). Anyway, in the spirit of ARC, I will close with a letter from one of my readers.

Dear Mr. Mathis: I just want to take a moment to say thanks for your discussion and insights about "New Realism": It's refreshing to know that someone with a relatively wide audience has taken time to call it like it is and to pose serious questions about meaningful content in contemporary realist art. Thank you, thank you, thank you! Sincerely, Robert X



# Hughes at the *Guardian*

by Miles Mathis



by John Spooner

Having recently become an American ex-patriate and *Guardian* reader, I am both thrilled and depressed by its arts coverage. It is refreshing to see criticism of the avant garde coming from the left. In the US, the left is nearly monolithic in regard to art. You either like the new stuff or you keep quiet. It is really uncool to demur. Anyone hedging in enthusiasm in any way immediately has his art-card revoked and is labeled a fascist. So seeing Saatchi and Emin and Hirst and the Tate Modern attacked by someone who is not at all the UK equivalent of Helms or Guiliani is like a gust of Hyperborean wind. All this is due to the influence of Robert Hughes, of course. All the arts coverage at the *Guardian* arcs about the gravity of Hughes, and this is completely understandable. The problem is that Hughes, Jones and the rest seem to wait around for Saatchi or Serota to show them something better, which is like waiting for the next Jupiter symphony from Madonna. Hughes himself has long been telling us that Modernism is dead: according to his own calendar, it has been dead since 1980. Continuing to monitor a 25-year old skeleton for twitches can only appear morbid. The Venice and Whitney Biennials and all the regular events are hopeless, as he says, so why continue to mention them? Why return to the Hungry Heifer?

Both in the *Guardian* and at *Time*, Hughes has taken refuge in the past. He dredges up early Dali or spends weeks hiding away with R. Crumb. This is also understandable. The modern world drives us all under the bed. If you want inspiration you don't go to a contemporary museum, you go to a library. But even contemporary art never dies. Hughes and Jones just aren't looking in the right places. Often they don't seem to be looking at all. Hughes has all but defined away the possibility of art except in the past. Hughes judges new art and old art by completely different standards. For him, new art must look new. But in his heart of hearts he hates modernity, and he hates newness for newness sake, as he has

admitted. So that leaves him in a no man's land, a Sinai desert with only himself and Lucian Freud huddling under a blasted bush.

Hughes eulogizes MoMA's Alfred Barr as a visionary, since he was capable of seeing art where no one else could. I would suggest that nothing is different now, except that Hughes has a different shade of blinders on than Barr's contemporaries. Hughes is making a step in the right direction when he promotes the Royal Academy, but this is only a nod to the future. He recognizes that craft will have to be reintroduced. Much of Hughes' draw to Freud is explained by craft. But the air in England will not allow Hughes to go any further than this; he is already out on a limb. He is already saying things that would completely bomb in the US, and he knows it. As long as he only promotes the future of craft, he is alright here, maybe, since no one believes in the future anyway. But how is it logical to promote the future of craft and ignore the present? Why doesn't he just start promoting the mallgalleries shows? He will say, because there is nothing there worth promoting. Maybe, but there is nothing worth promoting elsewhere, and elsewhere is promoted in spades. Hughes and Jones don't argue when Serota claims that the craftspeople (Hughes' "slow art" people) have their own promotion and awards. Where is it, exactly? Where are the Tate Galleries and Saatchi Galleries and Turner Prizes of Slow Art? The realists are allowed their mall shows and penny prizes and everyone agrees that parity has been achieved.

Why can Hughes look lovingly at Chardin and Goya and Rembrandt and the rest of the past, and look lovingly toward the future, when craft will charm his grandchildren, and yet not look lovingly or hopefully at the present? As I said, it is because he has painted himself into a theoretical corner. Either that or he simply can't take the next step, the step beyond throwing a rose to the Royal Academy. He can't take that step because he is not confident that his prestige will carry him through the waves of protest. He does not want to signal his own death knell by allying himself to something that is still anathema to the left. Freud's age and ugliness have made him acceptable. But how could a critic, no matter how big, stand next to a contemporary Whistler or Burne Jones or Chardin or Blake or even Goya? This sort of work is still politically suspect to the left even from dead men.

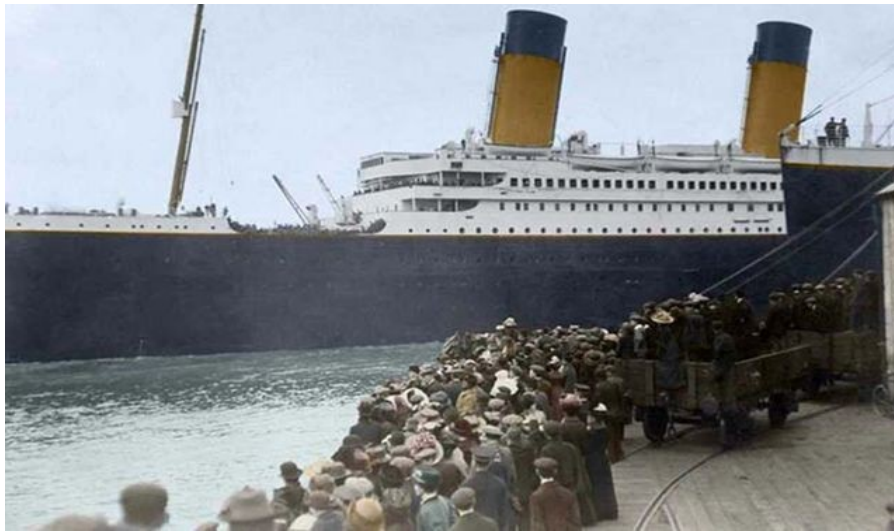
In short, the media and milieu in the UK appear to allow Hughes to push the argument way beyond where he can in the US. But it still does not allow him to take it where it logically must go, or where Hughes appears to want to take it himself.

PS: As an example of the kind of work Hughes cannot take seriously, I attach this 5m tall *Shelley Altarpiece*, exhibiting four separate slow arts—painting, sculpture, original poetry in calligraphy, and woodworking—as well as serious subject matter, epic theme, erudition, depth, and so on (the work concerns Percy Shelley's first wife and his and her drownings. For a complete description of the piece, go to <http://www.mileswmathis.com/trip4.html>. For detail scans go to <http://mileswmathis.com/trip2.html>. ) The work is by an artist who is not intellectually stunted, as Jones has said of the Stuckists. For proof of this, see <http://www.mileswmathis.com/la.html>. If this work is

not up to the standards of Hirst or Warhol or Freud, I would like to know why. If it does not answer Hughes' call for a return to craft, seriousness and the rest, I would like to know why.

# The Titanic:

## *the Fraud that Keeps on Giving*



*by Miles Mathis*

*First published October 2, 2018*

I haven't written anything about this one before because I assumed it had been done. See Robin Gardiner's 1998 book *Titanic: the Ship that Never Sank*. I hadn't read it and still haven't, but I had seen a youtube documentary outlining the major points. It seemed like a slamdunk, so I filed it under "done". However, now that I go back, I am not as satisfied as I was at first. That is the danger of watching a documentary and not doing your own research. I know not to do that, but in this case I got lazy. I guess I was glad to see that someone had already done the *Titanic*, so I didn't have to do it myself. I was wrong.

What got me in here was skimming the Wiki page. That is usually enough to get me going. I noticed several things almost instantly. One, this famous maiden voyage of the world's most famous ship was strangely underbooked. The ship was at a little over half capacity, so it reminds us immediately of the planes that were said to have crashed on 911. They were also about half empty. The *Titanic* could take 2,453 passengers, but only 1,317 were allegedly onboard. That's 53.7% capacity. Also a red flag is the mainstream's pathetic attempt to explain this anomaly: there was a coal strike in the UK that spring, causing many crossings to be canceled. But wait, wouldn't that make this uncanceled voyage

even more dear? They should have had thousands of people on stand-by lists, shouldn't they?—people who had had their other ship canceled and needed to get across the pond? In fact, that is part of the story in other places.

Another problem is that the mainstream math fails, to this day. They tell us 1,317 passengers were onboard, but 2,224 total were onboard (passengers and crew), with 1,500 dying. If we subtract, that means there was a crew of 907 onboard for 1,317 passengers—so almost every passenger had his own personal crewman? That despite the fact that 709 of the passengers were allegedly in third class, and shouldn't have expected much service. Only 324 were in first class. So, as I said, the numbers don't add up. You will see what I mean if you include one other fact: many of those in first class were already traveling with their own servants, so they didn't need service from a crew, except for food service. For instance, we are told Astor and his wife were traveling with their private valet and two lady's maids.

More indication of that is the total capacity of the *Titanic*, stated to be 3,547. That would be with a crew of 1,094. So at full capacity, the ship would have that crew, but with 53.7% capacity, they had a crew at 83%? As I said, it doesn't add up. They had about 320 more crew than they needed, even if we believe the given numbers. 212 crew are said to have survived, so my guess is that was the entire crew onboard. The other 696 were just made up.

Another problem is that on Madeleine Astor's page, Wiki posts a headline from the *New York Herald on the same day* (April 15), and that headline clearly states 1,800 onboard, 675 saved. How did the *Herald* compose this story so quickly? The *Titanic* goes down in the “wee hours” of April 15, and a few hours later the *Herald* has a full story, including pictures of all the famous people onboard? That's some pretty amazing work, isn't it? It looks like they already had the story written and illustrated before it even happened, which is pretty much par for the course.



You will tell me that says April 16, but that isn't how it looks to me. Also [see here](#), where it is confirmed that headline is from April 15. There we see the *New York Times* also had a story ready to go on the morning of April 15, stating 1,200 onboard and 655 saved. The *New York Tribune* tells us 1,340 perished, with 886 rescued, putting 2,226 onboard. The *Detroit News* tells us 1,241 missing and 868 saved, putting 2,109 onboard. Where are all these different numbers coming from? I can see some confusion on number missing, but since all ships are required to have a full passenger and crew list, the total onboard should be a firm number. It should not vary from 1,200 to 2,226. And if we read closely, we find the *New York Times* admitting its information came from the *Olympic* by wireless (telegraph). That means these numbers were coming straight from White Star Lines, which should have known a total onboard. At any rate, it would not be telling some newspapers one number and other newspapers another number. Unless it *wanted* to create confusion. It looks to me like someone decided to inflate the number from about 1,200 to about 2,200 in the first week.

Another problem is that Wiki gives us a partial list of 68 prominent people on the Titanic, but only 21 are listed as perished. So the survival rate for rich people was still very good, being about 70%. That's very curious as well.



In fact, that is what led me to my initial assumption: most of the people listed as perished probably faked their deaths, just as it is done today. We saw a long list of fake-dead people in our recent exposé of the [Las Vegas hoax](#), and if they can do it now they could do it then. In that paper, I researched a large part of the names individually, showing a lot of voodoo. In the present case, it is likely that all the rich people that needed to disappear were notified of the *Titanic* hoax before it happened: in this way they could avoid lawsuits, taxes, or other impending prosecution, while cashing out on their life insurance policies. For other fake deaths in second and third class, the ship could be loaded with Intelligence agents, who would then disappear after the rescue.



Astor as **Henry IV** of France

And why would they bother to do this? One, because apparently there were a lot of rich people who needed or wanted to disappear in 1912, including John Jacob Astor IV. Possibly they knew World War I was coming up and they needed to disappear. Two, because the hoax would be a lot more believable with the appearance of a large number of deaths. If such a ship sank with no casualties, the insurance company and public would naturally become suspicious. But when people like the captain and Astor appear to go down with the ship, far fewer people will be suspicious.

Speaking of suspicious, we find that Astor's nose has been corrected in many online photos. See this photo from Findagrave:



And compare it to this *later* snapshot:



Do you think he got a nose job to achieve that? No. So what are they hiding here? The usual: he was a crypto-Jew.

So, it now looks to me like Robin Gardiner's book was either misdirection or mistaken. I still assume going into this research that he was right about the switch of the *Titanic* for the *Olympic* and the insurance fraud, but it looks like he quit in the first stages, before getting to the even bigger stuff. That may have been his assignment. For instance, it is curious that Wikipedia has a page for both Gardiner and his theory. It even seems to be promoted, since both on Gardiner's page and on the page for Titanic Alternative Theories, his theory is given ten paragraphs and no rebuttal. Not what you would expect. Do they do that for any of my papers or books? Gardiner himself throws up many more red flags, since he is from Oxford and his father was military. This father's name even throws up a huge red flag, since he is given as Harold Gardiner. You may be interested to know there was a



Harold Gardiner **Bowen** who was US Vice Admiral (3-star) and head of the Office of Naval Research in the 1940s. He had also been in WWI. Which means he was a top spook. ONR is not the same as ONI, Office of Naval Intelligence, but they work closely together. Bowen was also involved in the Manhattan Project via the Naval Research Laboratory, which he directed 1939-1941. Bowen's son also became a Vice Admiral, and he headed the inquiry into the *Pueblo* incident. The *USS Pueblo* was of course a spy ship allegedly captured by North Korea in 1968, a week before the TET offensive. It is kept by North Korea to this day as a museum trophy, although officially the ship is still a commissioned vessel of the US Navy! This just means the whole thing was another hoax.

These Bowens were also Rhodes, since Bowen Sr's mother was a Rhodes, and they were from **Rhode** Island. Of course these Bowens also come from Massachusetts, since we saw them in [my paper on Lizzie Borden](#). They are also tied to Salem. However, Geni scrubs the maternal side of Admiral Bowen, preventing us from following the Gardiner line. However, the Gardners/Gardiners are known to be among the first settlers of Rhode Island, marrying the Bowens and Rhodes many times.

Indeed, we find a Harold Gardiner in the peerage, hidden as [Harry Gardiner](#). He was the son of **Lt. Col.** Stephen Gardiner, and he married a Minchin, related to a **Fisher**. Also related to a John **Hamilton** Byrne. Also related to **Murrays, Clarkes, Bartletts** and **Kings**. This probably links us to the Gardiners of Rhode Island, since they were related to the same families there. [They were also related to the Rathbuns](#), linking us to the later [Lincoln Assassination hoax](#). Even better, in 1884, we find [George Minchin](#) of this family marrying Naomi Clarke, daughter of an unknown female **Smith**. Why would this Smith be unknown, when her father's name is known as Richard Smith of Australia? Possibly because it would link us to Edward Smith, captain of the *Titanic* and previously captain of the *Olympic*. Her brother is also given as "unknown Smith". So, would this unknown Smith be of the right age to be Edward Smith? Well, if Naomi married in 1884, she would have been born in around 1866. Her mother would have been born in around 1848. Capt. Edward Smith was born in 1850, so we have a possible match.

Since Robin Gardiner lived in Oxford, we may be able to tie him to Gardiners in the peerage also in Oxford. See [Patrick Lancaster Gardiner](#), d. 1997 at Oxford, whose mother was a Lancaster (scrubbed) and whose aunt married the Baron Robbins. Robbins taught at the London School of Economics and was Chairman of the *Financial Times*. His parents are scrubbed. His son Richard married a Dobbs, daughter of Brigadier Dobbs, whose mother was an **Atkinson**. This may link us to Stephen Hawking, who I showed last week was an Atkinson of the peerage. Anyway, Patrick Gardiner married Susan **Booth** (also scrubbed), but we know what to think of that name. It links us to John Wilkes Booth and much other fakery, including more Booths below.

We can also link the Gardiners to the Queen, since in 1942 a Charlotte Gardiner married Douglas Gordon **Bowes-Lyon**, of the Earls of Strathmore. The Queen Mother was a Bowes-Lyon. So it is quite odd to find this Charlotte scrubbed. A nobody does not marry the grandson of an Earl. This also links the Gardiners to the Drummonds, Cholmodeleys, Stewarts and Percys (Earls of Beverly). Douglas Bowes-Lyons' brother Hubert married a **Jacobs** of South Africa in 1943, and their daughter went to Tel Aviv University. Which gives us the usual Jewish links here.

Robin Gardiner's co-author Dan van der Vat also throws up many red flags. He was with *The Times* and *Sunday Times* of London back to 1965, topping out as Bureau Chief in Germany. He moved to *The Guardian* in 1982 and continues to write for them to this day. Not the sort of person you would think would be blowing the *Titanic* hoax. He has written 14 books, while this one with Gardiner is the only one he has co-authored. All his other books are mainstream history books.

Capt. Edward Smith is also a strange bird, whose biography is very slight. We don't seem to know much about him. Geni scrubs him very thoroughly, as you would expect. And there are no pictures of him young. But just so you know, there are 27 Edward Smiths in the peerage, and many of them are also scrubbed. In other words, they might be Capt. Edward Smith and we would never know it. However, it is interesting that Frederick Smith, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Birkenhead, just happened to be MP in Liverpool at the time of the *Titanic* fraud. He has many ties to Oxford as well, having gone there and lectured there. He was also married there. His wife's father was a Reverend and Fellow at Corpus Christi, Oxford. This Earl Smith was already Privy Counsel by 1911. He became a **Lt. Col.** and was Attorney General during the war. He became Lord High Chancellor in 1919. He became High Steward of Oxford in 1922. He was the head of Tate and Lyle, a large **sugar refinery**. He was also head of Imperial Chemical Industries after 1926—the largest manufacturer in Britain. He was Churchill's best friend. Even more curious is that his history, like Capt. Edward Smith's, is mostly scrubbed. At the peerage, he seems to come out of nowhere. Seeing that he was always an arch-conservative, this seems very unlikely. He almost certainly comes from one of the Smith Baronets. Possibly the Smiths, Baronets Devon, who were **shipowners** and also into shipping **insurance**. See the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, Sir [Willie Reardon-Smith](#), b. 1887, director of Leeds Shipping Company, Devon Mutual Steamship Insurance Association, and UK Mutual Steamship Assurance Association. If we could tie these Smith Baronets to the *Titanic* event, it would indicate the insurance companies were in on the fraud somehow. You will ask how an insurance company can defraud itself, but there are ways. For instance, premiums are supposed to go into a pool, with claimants paid from that pool. But say that pool is drained to pay one huge fraudulent claim, part of the money being kicked back to certain directors of the insurance company. The insurance company then declares bankruptcy and the directors hide their windfall somehow. Well, in that case, the losers are the ignorant shareholders of the company and the ignorant policyholders—whose policies are now worthless. Even if the directors are fined somehow or have to liquidate certain assets, if they run the scheme right their gains will far exceed their losses.

And this of course reminds us of all the money to be made in this event from life insurance fraud. Since this would qualify as an accident according to the mainstream story, many of these policies would pay double or triple indemnity. How much did Astor's fake widow get for his fake death, for instance? Since he was one of the richest men in America in 1912, it would have to be a stupendous amount. You think Astor didn't know how to defraud insurance companies? He *owned* many insurance companies, so I think he probably had an inside track, don't you? Obviously, anyone who wants to penetrate the entire *Titanic* hoax will have to follow Robin Gardiner's insurance fraud hint, but they will have to go far deeper than he did. It already looks to me like he hit level one in a rabbit hole that goes down at least ten levels.

For instance, we are told that Lloyd's of London insured the *Titanic*, and had to pay out around 10 million dollars just for the lost ship. That is according to the [Denver Post](#), 1912. But that same article states Lloyd's only had \$15 million on deposit, so they just lost 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of their value. They should have been devastated, but apparently weren't, so something doesn't add up here. We are told they paid in full within 30 days. That doesn't sound right, either, since none of us have had that experience with insurance companies. They normally drag their feet for the smallest claim. But we are supposed to believe they were able to fully investigate this *Titanic* fiasco in under thirty days, although it happened out in the middle of the North Atlantic? Also note the date of that article at the *Denver Post*: April 16, the day after. So we are supposed to believe they wrote this promotion of Lloyd's overnight? They didn't have anything better to report in the first 24 hours than this glowing promotion of the insurance company? C'mon! That by itself is a huge clue.

Also curious that we are told Lloyd's was involved in the development and implementation of the wireless telegraph that was used for the first time with the *Titanic*, but which did no one any good. But remember, we don't know what the telegraphs actually said. Wireless could be used to call for help, but it could also be used to coordinate a massive fraud at sea, couldn't it?



[Added October 3: But let us return to Capt. Edward Smith. You will say that if he survived the “wreck”, someone would have spotted him. Actually, some did, and one story [made the papers](#). The Quartermaster of the *Majestic* Peter Pryal spotted him in Baltimore in 1921 and called to him by name. And he answered. Pryal went to the newspapers with his story, and some printed it. That link goes to the *New York Sun*.

And I have more on Capt. Smith. His ancestry also links us forward to. . . are you ready? . . . J. K. Rowling. If you consult [my paper on her](#), you will remember I linked her to a Major Edward Pelham Smith, whose granddaughter married the grandson of Sir Henry Morton **Stanley** (Livingston, I presume). Yes, there are a lot of Smiths, but if I can show a link between the two Edward Smiths, it would also link Capt. Edward Smith to the **Stanleys, Earls of Derby**, which would not surprise any of my readers. Plus, we will find below Capt. **Stanley** Lord, who just happened to be the captain of the *USS Californian*. I suspect his name also links us to the Stanleys, though it is difficult to prove. Like the rest of these people, he is pretty well scrubbed online.

However, we get three *very big* clues regarding the two Edward Smiths on the Wiki page for Capt Smith. Capt. Edward Smith of the *Titanic* had one daughter. Her name was Helen **Melville** Smith. If we go thepeerage.com and look again at Maj. Edward Pelham Smith, we discover his grandfather was Abel Smith. Abel Smith's first wife was Lady Marianne Leslie-Melville, daughter of Alexander Leslie- **Melville**, the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of **Leven**. Not only that, but Lady Marianne's sister also married a Smith of the same family. These Smiths go way back in the peerage, predating the Smith baronets by several centuries (1400). This is strange because for centuries they don't have titles and aren't linked to anyone with titles. So we don't know why they are listed. They don't become baronets until George Smith marries the daughter of the **Howe** baronet and becomes one himself in 1757. This was a big marriage for the Smiths, because Mary Howe's grandmother Ruperta Hughes was the illegitimate child of Rupert von der Pfalz, AKA Prince Rupert of the Rhine, Duke of Cumberland. His father was Frederick V, Elector Palatine and **King of Bohemia**, and his mother was Princess Elizabeth **Stuart**, **daughter of King James I**, taking us right to the top. Bohemia is also the usual red flag, since through his grandmother Elisabeth of Hesse, Frederick was descended from Barbara **Jagiellon**.

So we are starting to get somewhere in understanding these Smiths. As you would expect, they were bankers, and that is what allowed them to marry into the peerage. George Smith's grandfather Thomas Smith was the founder of the Smith Bank of Nottingham. Curiously, George Smith was the Sheriff of Nottingham, which makes us think of Robin Hood. Also strange is that George Smith's son became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, but he changed his name to Pauncefote-**Bromley**, after his grandmother Elizabeth Pauncefote. He married the daughter of the Viscount Curzon, and their son became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet. He again changed his name, this time to Howe-Bromley. He became **Vice-Admiral** of the White in 1854. So you may want to remember that these Smiths are the same as the later Bromleys. They are

also the same as the Barons Carrington, via the third son of Abel Smith. These Carringtons did just as well as the Bromleys, marriage-wise, linking themselves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Stanhope Earls, the Somerset Dukes, the **Gardner Barons**, the Foresters, the Manners Dukes, and the Drummond Dukes. These Smiths also became the Barons of Bicester, with Hugh Colin Smith becoming the Governor of the Bank of England in 1897. I trust you see how these banking and admiralty connections are important to our investigation here. Hugh's daughter married a **Baring**, of a “rival” bank. The actress Rachel Ward is his 2g-granddaughter.

I also beg you to note the name **Gardner** there, since it probably links us to author Robin **Gardiner**. As it turns out the Gardner Barons were great seamen as well, the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron being Admiral Alan Gardner. His first two sons also became admirals and his third son was a major general. His son-in-law Barrie was also an admiral. This may indicate that Robin Gardiner was closely related to the captain of the *Titanic*, explaining his involvement in this. More indication of that is that Robin Gardiner's father “was a military man who worked in the **Indian Institute**”. This is telling since many of the people we have been looking at were involved in running India. Just so you know, the Gardners were also linked closely after the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the Herberts, Earls of Carverton; the Stanhopes, Earls of Chesterfield; the Howards, Earls of Arundel and Dukes of Norfolk; the Stuarts, Dukes of Lennox; the Molyneux Baronets; the Hughes, Barons Dinorben; the Onslows, Earls of Onslow; the Beaumonts, Barons Allensdale; and the **Fullers**.

But let us return to Abel Smith, the father of Maj. Edward Pelham Smith. His brother Robert married Isabel Adeane, whose mother was. . . Hon. Matilda **Stanley**. This gives us a second and nearer link to the Stanleys, since Matilda's father was the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Stanley of Alderley. We also find quick links to the **Barclays**, since Abel's sister Caroline married a Hanbury, grandson of a Barclay. They were also bankers of course, which gives us the Smiths, the Barings, and the Barclays, all in short order.

With more digging in the peerage, we can link Capt. Edward Smith to these people again through his parents. His mother was a **Marsh**. Well, in 1840, the Rev. William Marsh of the peerage married Lady Louisa Cadogan, daughter of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Cadogan and Frances Bromley, daughter of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron **Bromley** of Montfort. We have just seen that Capt. Smith was related to these Bromley/Smiths via the Melvilles. And, as you will see below, the head of Lloyd's of London at the time of the wreck was Cuthbert Heath, son of Emma Marsh, indicating that Smith was closely related to the head of Lloyd's.

We can also link Capt. Smith to the Smith baronets via his mother's middle name **Hancock**. Geni doesn't give us that name, but Wikipedia does, in the sidebar. The Hancocks at that time were closely related to the **Trevelyan**s, and so were the Smith Baronets. See [Rev. Frederick Hancock](#) who married a Woodhouse, daughter of a Trevelyan in 1874; and [Robert Smith](#), 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Carrington, whose second

wife was Charlotte Hudson, daughter of Susanna Trevelyan. You should also look at 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet Trevelyan, educated at the **East India Company**. He married the sister of Lord **Macauley**, linking us to all these same people. His second wife was a **Campbell**, daughter of a **King**, ditto. This gives us another link, since the Smiths were related to the Kings through the Adeanes. His brother married a **Pleydell-Bouverie**, which is yet another link. Maj. Edward Pelham Smith married Dorothy Morton Mansel-**Pleydell**. Trevelyan's son the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet was Lord of the Admiralty in 1868 and married a **Philips**.

But back to Captain Smith. Interesting that his daughter married a **Russell-Cooke**. This is more evidence they were from the peerage. One of her daughters married a **Phipps**. By the way, there are Russell-Smiths in the peerage. You should also know that Russell-Cooke is a famous London law firm, formed in 1880 by William Russell-Cooke and Sir Henry **Paget-Cooke**. The Pagets are high up in the peerage, being the Earls of Uxbridge and the Marquesses of **Anglesey**. Like the Smiths, the Pagets are closely related to the Manners, Dukes of Rutland.

So, to sum up, I have linked Captain Smith to the peerage via the names Melville, Marsh, Hancock, Russell, and Phipps. No doubt there are more connections one could uncover with more digging. We have seen how this links him to many dukes, and also to King James I.]

Which brings us back to Astor. [He was said to have been one of 333](#) bodies pulled from the sea, although his body wasn't identified until several days later. Right. Note that lovely Masonic number of

**333**. And how could a body be identified later, when it couldn't be identified immediately? Although many eyewitness reports (planted immediately in the press) said Astor's body was badly injured from falling from smokestacks [or fighting with giant octopi, I guess], the mortician reported no injuries. Of course that indicates the body *wasn't* that of Astor. The funeral service was on May 3, and that adds to eight. That's 18 days later, so we may assume it wasn't open casket: that would have stunk up the whole place. He was buried at **Trinity** Cemetery. They didn't have a Matrix Cemetery available at the time, I guess.

Also remember that Mrs. Astor was pregnant at the time of the *Titanic* sailing, but mysteriously didn't suffer a miscarriage, either from the mayhem or from the alleged death of her husband. We saw a similar mystery [in the Lindbergh baby hoax](#), where a pregnant Mrs. Lindbergh suffered no trauma when her previous baby was dug out of a shallow grave nearby, half-eaten by animals. I suggest Mrs. Astor was never on the *Titanic*, since in creating such a hoax, you wouldn't wish to have a pregnant billionaire's wife on the ship regardless. She was probably roasting on the RMS *Carpathia*, eating figs and playing shuffleboard.





This is also strange. It is a picture of Astor's Trinity tomb. He is memorialized there as John J. Astor. With a period after Astor, as you see, but no IV. Why do they need a period there? And since he was buried next to his namesakes, how did they differentiate one tomb from another? How did they know this was IV and not I, II, or III? Also, do you really think the richest man in America couldn't afford the extra four letters of his middle name on his tombstone? He needs to abbreviate Jacob as J.?

Which brings us to the next problem. In these stories, Astor is said to be among the richest men in the world at the time. But John D. Rockefeller was alive in 1912, and according to Wikipedia and *Forbes*, he was worth \$400 billion in 1913. Astor is said to be worth \$2.2 billion. So again, they can't keep their stories straight. J. P. Morgan died in 1913 with a wealth of about \$3 billion, and Rockefeller said "he wasn't a rich man". So we are supposed to believe the Astors had squandered their money since 1850, when everyone admits they were the richest family in the US? That is very unlikely, since—like the Rockefellers—they were involved in banking. As bankers, they knew how to earn interest on their money, getting richer every decade. The Rockefellers had about a trillion by 1930, and have multiplied that by many times since then. Likewise, we may assume the Astors were worth at least 500 billion by 1912, making the claim of 2.2 billion another grand lie. If Astor didn't score at least \$10 million on his life insurance policy alone, I would be very surprised.

Do you have any idea how easy it would be for someone like Astor to hide out? These people have huge estates all over the world, so faking a death is no inconvenience at all. It isn't like they have to never leave the house. Astor didn't even *need* to travel by a public transport like the *Titanic*. These people have their own private ships, or can hire their Greek billionaire cousins to take them anywhere, with no questions asked by customs agents anywhere. The rules don't apply to them, and they only admit their existences to start with because they want to see themselves in the papers. We may assume there are wealthy people that you have never heard of: they have *never* officially existed. They don't have to fake their deaths because they have never officially been alive. My guess is it is these people that actually rule the world.

Anyway, we can already see that the *Titanic* fraud looks like a con run by the insurance companies themselves. Best guess at this juncture is that Robin Gardiner was linked somehow to Lloyd's of London, and they hired him to throw White Star Lines under the bus. Since White Star no longer

exists, it can be the fall guy. So Gardiner makes them the bad guys, while continuing to whitewash or misdirect away from Lloyd's, Astor, and many other parties.

With that in mind, we should look more closely at Lloyd's. Lloyd's is a towering red flag from the first word, since it isn't really an insurance company per se. It is a group of companies and individuals, or a **syndicate**, that has joined as underwriters of risk. It was created by Act of Parliament in 1871 (though it had existed since 1686), and is one of the spookiest companies in the world. In 2017 alone, it wrote about £37 billion in premiums, and—like a casino—we may assume it paid out a small fraction of that.

Curiously, we find that there was a Lloyd's Act passed by Parliament in 1911, just **a few months before** the *Titanic* hoax. A clue is even found in the date of the Act: August 18, 1911. Or, **18/8/11**. Aces and eights, as usual. This was an act to “extend the objects of and confer further powers on Lloyd's”. One of the objects was to extend Lloyd's underwriting from marine to all sorts of insurance, *including life insurance* and all guarantee business [clause 3]. Another important extension was to make one of the main objects of the Society “the *collection, publication, and diffusion of intelligence* and information”. In other words, Lloyd's was being made part of the worldwide Intelligence community by act of Parliament. **All this happened just a few months before the *Titanic* hoax.** Coincidence? You have to be kidding me. Also note the “and diffusion” part of that quote. Lloyd's wasn't just approved to collect intelligence, it was approved to diffuse it. What is “diffusing Intelligence?” Wouldn't that be. . . propaganda?

So, did Astor have a life insurance policy with Lloyd's? Although Lloyd's is usually thought to be British, they do half their business in North America and only 29% in Europe. My assumption is Astor's policy was underwritten by Lloyd's. Ditto for other life insurance policies of the bigwigs, like Guggenheim, etc.

Also important is section 6, which states that within six months [which would fall on February 18, 1912], the capital stock of the Society would be transferred by the Trustees to the Society itself, with the *Trustees giving up their trust*. According to section 7, the funds and property of the Society and any income therefrom was afterwards “for the benefit of the members of the Society jointly”. In other words, the previous Trust was dissolved, and the members now owned the company directly, with any money not paid out in claims or spent by the business going directly to them. That may look great for members on the surface, but it actually left them extremely vulnerable, since they were no longer shielded by the Trust. You will see why that is important in a moment.





With that in mind, we can look at Cuthbert Heath, one of the famous heads of Lloyd's in 1912. We find him in the peerage, of course, the son of Vice-Admiral Sir Leopold George Heath, whose mother was a Dunbar (scrubbed). Sir Leopold married Emma **Marsh** in **Malta** in 1853. Malta gives us the usual Jewish connection, and the name Marsh ties us to *Titanic* Capt. Edward Smith, whose mother was also a Marsh. **This of course indicates the captain of the *Titanic* and the head of Lloyd's were closely related.** Cuthbert's three brothers were also **Admirals** and Generals. See Admiral Sir Herbert Heath, whose daughter married a Fane de Salis, of the Comtes de Salis. The 4<sup>th</sup> Comte had married the daughter of Vice-Admiral Francis **Drake**. Also see Maj. Gen. Frederick Heath-Caldwell; and Maj. Gen. Sir Gerard Moore Heath, who married into the Egerton Baronets, connecting him to the **Egerton- Warburtons, Spencers, Styles, Boswells, Marjoribanks, and Campbells**. Cuthbert himself married Sarah **Gore** Gambier, scrubbed, and his daughter later married Capt. **Hamilton**, son of the Duke of Abercorn. So despite already being from nobility, Cuthbert Heath moved up in the world considerably after 1912.

Also of interest is discovering that Heath and Lloyd's sold tons of air-raid insurance, protecting against the risk of German strategic bombing in WWI. We may assume Lloyd's did the same thing in WWII.

This plays back into [my paper on the Bombing of Britain](#), where I showed much fakery involved, even suggesting the RAF may have attacked Britain themselves. Well, we can now add to that what we just discovered about Lloyd's being an admitted part of British Intelligence gathering *and diffusion* since 1911.

Another head of Lloyd's in this period was Henry **Lyons**, who later became a Baronet and then Baron Ennisdale. He is probably linked to the Bowes-Lyons and the Queen.

OK, assuming Lloyd's ran some sort of con here, what would it be? It can't be the one I outlined above, since Lloyd's didn't declare bankruptcy. The go-to con these days would be to have the company “re- insured” by the State, so that if they suffered catastrophic losses they could be bailed out by the taxpayers. Taxpayers and the Treasury are the mark. We saw that con run heavily against the US Treasury in the past twenty years, with TARP and PPIP and so on. Of course this scenario begs rampant corruption, since big companies can fake losses and still be reimbursed for them. Was Lloyd's guaranteed by the English treasury somehow? It is not admitted, but possibly. There was a lot of mysterious re-insuring going on, so those re-insurers—whoever they were, State or private—may have been the mark. A similar scenario is suggested by the fact that Lloyd's had begun expanding their membership base since the 1870s, allowing far more underwriters into the pool. These minor underwriters may have been targeted by the original major ones, and they were allowed to take the losses. How would that work? I don't know, but say the major underwriters made a deal with a huge policyholder like White Star Lines, by which White Star kicked back a large part of the pay-out to them with the agreement that nothing would be investigated? This would leave the minor underwriters—who were out of the loop—holding the bag. They would have to cover the losses themselves. Since they weren't dukes or earls, they would be allowed to fail.

Any evidence that is what was happening? Yes, because Lloyd's extended the con even further in the 1960s, and that is pretty much admitted at Wiki, though you have to look closely. Lloyd's had around 6,000 members when Hurricane Betsy struck, but the loss of £50 billion led to a mass exodus of members, indicating they had been wiped out. To refill their coffers, Lloyd's first commissioned a secret internal inquiry led by Lord Cromer, who had been Governor of the Bank of England. So of course he was trustworthy. That's also why it needed to be secret. Honest people always need secret inquiries, right? We aren't told what this report discovered, though I suspect they discovered what I just told you, with Cromer being hired to cover it up. He then recommended they open up membership even more, to bring in newer and dumber suckers. They opened membership to non-UK and women, and removed capitalization requirements. Meaning the investors could be quite minor. Most importantly, the liability of these new suckers was *unlimited*—meaning all their personal wealth and assets were at risk, not just their investment in Lloyd's. Hard to believe anyone signed up for this rape, but apparently many people did.

In the 1970s, the British Gov allowed Lloyd's to move its assets offshore, avoiding taxes. Only the fact that the same people that owned Lloyd's also owned the British Gov can explain that. Lloyd's immediately became a tax shelter, and all sorts of new fraud was encouraged—which Wikipedia admits.

This is also admitted in the Sasse scandal story of the 1970s, which somehow came to light. There, it is admitted that the “risks written were rigged: typically dilapidated buildings in slums such as [New York's south Bronx](#), which soon burned down after being insured for large sums.” That just proves

that insurance companies can be involved in precisely that sort of scam, and we must assume it worked by part of the money being kicked back to the insurers. **They also admit it worked by targeting minor underwriters in the syndicate, who were told they were responsible for the losses.** In the mainstream stories, they pretend that head underwriter Dennis Harrison was not an approved underwriter of Lloyd's, instead being a mafioso who had fooled the Society somehow, but that is just cover. Anyway, it looks like this came to light due to lawsuits by these minor underwriters, who figured out they were being scammed. But they were only partly successful, only lowering their losses by about 55%. Amazingly, Lloyd's itself dodged blame. And the major underwriters dodged scrutiny, we may assume by owning the courts. This is because after 1911, Lloyd's was basically a ghost. Legally, it didn't exist at all, except as a name. Legally, the individual underwriters shouldered all the financial responsibility, so "the Society" was untouchable. In court, "the Society" disappeared into a London fog.

A similar thing happened in the late 80s with the Piper Alpha oil rig explosion. Through re-insurance, many minor underwriters were exposed multiple times, and a large number were destroyed. This of course links us to my paper on the [Deepwater Horizon oil disaster](#), where I suggested it may have been a fake as well. No doubt this was another chance for insurance fraud, though I haven't read anything about it. The fact they made a movie about it tends to support my suspicion. Hollywood always salts in these fakes.

Tellingly, Lloyd's was also involved in insuring the Twin Towers on 911, and they are among the ones who paid out to Larry Silverstein. This of course gives us a whole new twist on that event, one given little time up to this point. I don't know that anyone has suggested the insurers were involved in that fraud, so let me be the first. I beg you to notice how much that event looks like the *Titanic* event, from the point of both the insured and the insurer. It has previously been suggested that a main point of the 911 event was to get rid of buildings that were no longer profitable, didn't meet code, and couldn't be brought up to code without ruinous losses. It has been shown that Larry Silverstein made a huge profit from the event, but it was never shown why the insurers didn't properly investigate, finding what private "conspiracy" investigators discovered very quickly without that much effort. Since Lloyd's has an extensive Intelligence gathering department, it should look odd that it failed to discover these things, and never brought any of the anomalies up in court. Also notice that 911 not only looks like a later clone of the *Titanic* event, it also looks like an analogue of the event described above in the Sasse scandal, where "risks written were rigged: typically dilapidated buildings in slums such as [New York's south Bronx](#), which soon burned down after being insured for large sums." Don't the Twin Towers now look like just a larger version of the same con?

You will say I have no proof Lloyd's was involved in either 911 or the *Titanic* hoax, which is true enough. Everything I have presented is circumstantial, and stands only as a suggestion. However, my

line of reasoning here is pretty obvious. I saw and wrote all this in less than 24 hours, so it didn't take much research to come to this conclusion. It only required I follow a line of pretty obvious clues. No doubt anyone who cared to could make a strong case with more work, and the governors only consolation is that it appears no one cares to do stuff like this. The minor insurers of the *Titanic* are long dead, and their ancestors have no reason to reopen the case. The lawsuits of 911 are over as well, and since no minor underwriters got a sniff of the fraud there, it is doubtful they will read this paper and have any light turn on. So it all may appear academic. Which is fine with me: I have not been hired by the defense or the prosecution, and I am just here to solve the case for my own edification, as you probably are. Yes, this will further discourage me from buying insurance, but since I don't own any of any kind, that is pretty meaningless as well. I had already decided insurance was a scam before I discovered any of this today, so this won't change my beliefs at all. Besides, I don't believe in betting against myself. All insurance is a bet against yourself, and therefore it is tempting Fate and bad Karma.

While I am here I might as well return to the Wiki page on the *Titanic*, to see if I can tease any more information out of it. Everything I look at these days tends to crumble into a pile of salt, so I guess I should continue to do my thing. The first thing I notice is Gladys (Millvina) Dean, alleged to be the last survivor of the *Titanic*. She was 2 months old in April of 1912.



First of all, the name Gladys Dean indicates she was probably Jewish. Her page has several anomalies, the first being that her mother was 33 in 1912. The second is that her brother Bertram allegedly died on April 14, the anniversary of the event. The third is that his middle name was **Vere**, probably linking this family to the de Veres of the peerage. They were the Earls of Oxford, and one was involved in [the Shakespeare hoax](#). The fourth is his first name Bertram, which is another name from the peerage. You would much more likely find the name in first class rather than third class. The fifth is that we are told Millvina and Bertram were raised on pension funds. What pension funds? Their father was allegedly in his thirties, moving to Kansas to co-own a tobacco shop with his cousin. So where does any pension come in? And how could this third-class traveller afford to buy a tobacco

shop? The sixth is that Millvina didn't become involved in *Titanic* promotion until she was in her 70s. I guess that is because the *Titanic* wasn't famous until the 1990s.

**[Added October 3:** In fact, I later discovered a probable link between this Dean woman and the captain of the *Titanic* Edward Smith. I have linked Smith to the Smith baronets through the name Melville. In making this link, I found an [Abel Smith](#) of that Melville line who married a Calvert in 1826. Her brother, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, changed his name from Calvert to Verney, and married the daughter of Admiral Sir George Hope-**Vere**. We just saw Bertram **Vere** Dean, brother of Millvina Dean. That indicates Dean and Capt. Smith were closely related, and both from the peerage. They don't tell you that, do they?]

We are told the *Carpathia* rescued 705 people from the *Titanic*, so at this point in the investigation we may guess that would be that was all that were ever onboard. Minus 212 crew, that would be 493 passengers, which sounds about right. Since this was a managed event, either the passenger lists were faked, the crew list was faked, or both. The *Carpathia* list was probably also faked, since that ship was part of the hoax. It may have picked up more than 705 [or none]. The *Titanic* lists could be padded in several ways, which we have seen in more recent hoaxes. They could include people that had recently died from other causes, so we should look for a preponderance of elderly onboard. They could include the names of agents throughout the world who needed to disappear as part of their cover that year. And they could include names simply made up from scratch. These made-up names often include some sort of inside joke.

Further down the page, we have a huge anomaly. Canadian ships were allegedly the first to arrive on the scene after the *Carpathia* took the survivors away. These Canadian ships were supposed to collect bodies, but there were too many to collect. So Captain Larnder of the *Mackay-Bennett* decided to preserve the bodies only of first-class passengers, dumping second and third-class passengers and crew back into the sea. Of course this makes no sense on any level. What it indicates is that these second and third-class passengers never existed. In fact, there is no proof of their existence, or at least of their deaths. All evidence was conveniently “buried at sea” as usual. Plus, how exactly did Captain Larnder and his men figure out who was from what class? Did they all still have ticket stubs in their pockets after floating for several days in the ocean? Or did he just pull in those wearing tuxedos or top hats? Despite the Canadians only collecting the wealthy-looking, one-third of the bodies were never identified or claimed. Really? One-third of the first-class passengers had no relatives and no one was looking for them? Almost half the bodies gathered (150) were never collected or claimed, and were buried in-masse in Halifax. Again, really? That is what we are expected to believe? Despite picking out only first-class passengers from the floaters, 150 were never claimed and were dumped into a mass grave in Nova Scotia? That alone proves this was fake.

Three more bodies from collapsible A were unceremoniously dumped at sea by the RMS *Oceanic*, with no effort to identify them. The *Oceanic* didn't have the lame excuse of the *Mackay-Bennett*, since she picked up only a dozen survivors. So she couldn't claim there was no room onboard for three more bodies. Then we are told that in June, the last support ships were reporting that life jackets were failing, and the last bodies were sinking to the ocean floor. Again, WHAT? We are supposed to believe that not only did Capt Larnder order the bodies to be thrown back in the ocean with their life vests still on, someone ordered all other ships to leave the bodies out there, with no effort at retrieval? Does that make any sense to you? Because these hundreds of bodies were third-class or crew, they were just flotsam? No one was looking for these people or their bodies? There was no outcry in the US or Europe from family members? Just think if this happened today. Do you think hundreds of bodies in life-jackets would be left floating for two months, in the sight of many rescue ships? Of course the fact that no one was looking for these people and no one was raising any outcry in the US indicates these people did not exist. The whole story was manufactured. And yet, despite the absurdity of the story, it is still being sold 106 years later, and I guess most people are buying it.

The story fails in yet another way. Sharks. Remember the *USS Indianapolis*, referenced in the film *Jaws*? Quint tells us there “1100 went into the water. . . 316 men come out: the sharks took the rest”. That was in four days. But according to the ridiculous story above, the *Titanic* went down in the warm fertile waters of the Northern Gulfstream, which is stiff with sharks, but the bodies were still in their lifevests two months later. Bodies don't last for two months on the surface of the ocean: they get eaten!

Next, I tried to access a death list at [titanicfacts.net](http://titanicfacts.net), but was denied access, even to a cached page. So I went instead to the *Belfast Telegraph*, but it only has a list from A to Pa. So I returned to Wikipedia. The first thing I noticed is that the list does not include Astor's butler, though he is listed elsewhere. This Victor Robbins is also not listed with second or third-class passengers. Rather, we are told Mrs. Astor had both a maid and a nurse. This is curious since Mrs. Astor had no child. She was only pregnant. So why did she need a nurse? You will say “*because she was pregnant. She might need medical care or a midwife.*” No, she was in the first stages of pregnancy, not even showing, so there would be no need for a nurse.

The next thing I noticed is that whoever faked this list didn't like vowels, especially the letter “E”.

Statistically, there are far too few surnames starting in vowels, especially in first and second class. Only the letter “A” is representing in anything like a statistical manner. All other vowels are used far too infrequently for this to be a real list.

Another curious thing we find on that page is that some numbers were not used, just so the total could stand at 333. For instance, they skip the numbers 324-5, for no apparent reason.

I encourage my readers to study this list for more anomalies, but I don't have the stamina for it right now. I want to return to the high profile passengers like Astor. One of these was Benjamin **Guggenheim**, father of Peggy Guggenheim of the Guggenheim museums. We can be sure he faked his death. Why? Here's why: on his page we are told he put his women on lifeboat 9. This was a huge wooden Harland and Wolff lifeboat, with a capacity of 65 people. Wikipedia has very little to tell us about Benjamin Guggenheim's life, but they are keen to tell us he bravely went down with the ship:

As Aubart and Sägesser reluctantly entered Lifeboat No. 9, Guggenheim spoke to the maid in German, saying, "We will soon see each other again! It's just a repair. Tomorrow the *Titanic* will go on again." Realizing that the situation was much more serious than he had implied, as well as realizing he was not going to be rescued, he then returned to his cabin with Giglio and the two men changed into evening wear.

That is quoted from the *New York Times*, April 20, 1912. But it turns out it is hogwash, since all he had to do is step on that boat with the women. No one was fighting for the extra seats, not women or children of any class. If we check the stats, there were only 22 people on lifeboat 9, so 43 seats were empty when it lowered. There were four people from first class, 16 from second class, and two from third class. So please tell me why Benny didn't jump on. He just had a death wish? Of course Guggenheim's body was never retrieved or identified. Although Capt Larnder pulled 306 first-class-looking bodies out of the water, and although only 118 men from first-class died and 154 from second-class died, he wasn't able to locate Guggenheim or any of the other important people. Amazing, isn't it? I guess they thought lifevests didn't look good with their evening wear.

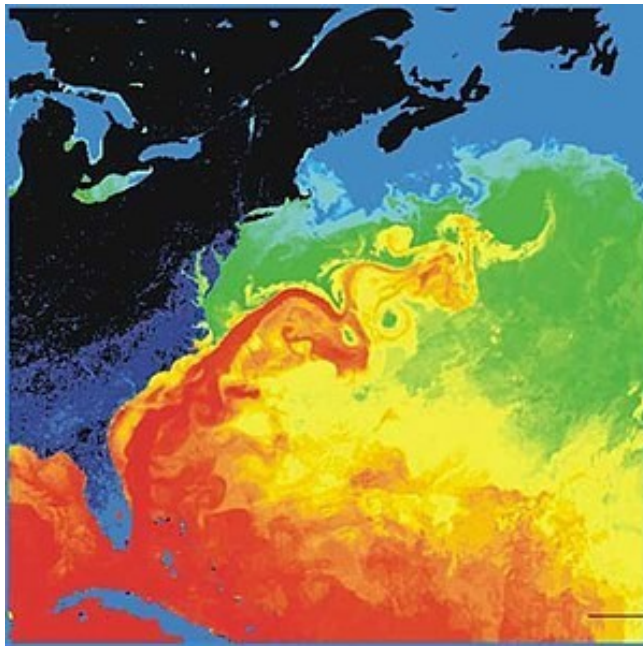
Which brings us finally to that pesky iceberg. If we study the path of the *Titanic*, we quickly come to realize she was never far enough north to hit an iceberg in mid-April.





She wasn't taking the polar route, was she? No, as you can see, the *Titanic* site is at about the same latitude as New York City or Madrid, Spain, or **Rome, Italy**. The exact latitude is given as 41.7° north. New York City is at 40.4. Have you ever spotted an iceberg off the coast of New York in April? I didn't think so. How about Boston? No. Also remember that the Gulfstream is warm, and it moves north in the North Atlantic. You may wish to visit the Wiki page on Gulfstream, where you will see this lovely graphic:

The subtext there is:



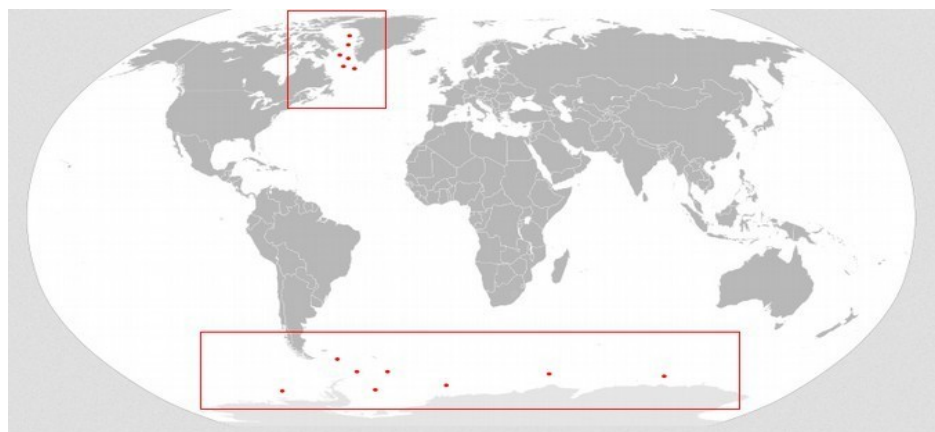
Surface temperatures in the western North Atlantic. The North American landmass is black and dark blue (cold), while the Gulf Stream is red (warm). Source: [NASA](#)

NASA tells us: Warm. More research tells us red is 25°C, yellow is 20, green is 15. Even at green, that is a water surface temperature of almost 60°F. 25°C is 77°F. Hello! Are you awake? Ships follow the Gulfstream across the Atlantic on purpose, and always have. Check out old Ben Franklin's map of the Gulfstream, noting how it curves and goes over toward Europe. Also note the little ships





on it. Ships simply don't hit icebergs at 41.7 N in mid-April in the Gulfstream. No ship before the *Titanic* ever had. And of course the *Titanic* didn't either. Only complete idiots would believe such a story. For the *Titanic* to encounter icebergs in April, it would have had to be hundreds of miles off-course, up north by Newfoundland. There, around the shallow Great Banks of Newfoundland, the Labrador Current comes down and nullifies the warm water of the Gulfstream. But the *Titanic* wasn't within 400 miles of that area.



I got that from the [National Snow and Ice Data Center](#), on its page called “quick facts on icebergs”. See how far north those little red dots are? The subtext to that graphic is:

**Icebergs are commonly found near Antarctica and in the North Atlantic Ocean near Greenland.**

As I said, nowhere near the fake *Titanic* wreck site. And those icebergs aren't 400 miles away, they are more like 1000 miles away. The wreckage site is 370 miles SE of Mistaken Point, Newfoundland, and the southernmost of those red dots is another 500 miles north of that.

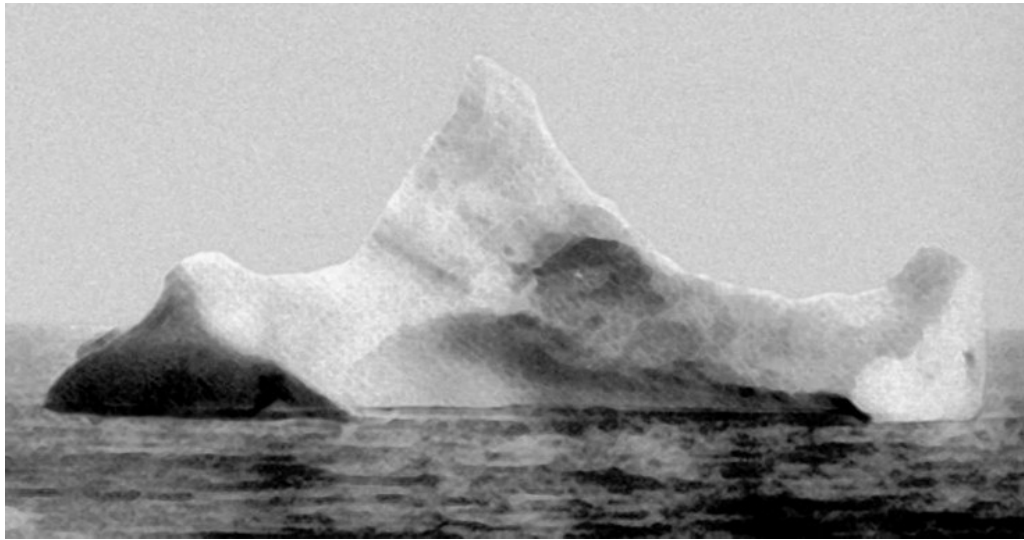
Also return to the NASA graphic. Notice that the waters are actually colder near the coast of New York and Boston than further out where the *Titanic* was. So if you haven't seen any icebergs floating around off the coast there in April, you would be even *less likely* to see them hundreds of miles out.

**[Added April 2020:** One of my readers checked the surface water temperature on the anniversary of the *Titanic*. He found it was 68 degrees F at that latitude and longitude, confirming what I said above. That is the north gyre of the Sargasso Sea, if you want to look it up yourself. That was confirmed again in a more recent paper of mine, where I discovered that in a 1976 *National Geographic* article, Dr. Mitchell from NOAA admits that the northern hemisphere went through an era of significant warming from 1880 to 1940. Furthermore, on March 2, 1975, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that “for the first time this century ships making for Iceland ports have been impeded by drifting ice”. Do you see what that means? That contradicts the *Titanic* story, doesn't it? The *Titanic* allegedly hit an iceberg in 1912, which is the same century as 1975. And it allegedly did so far south of Iceland. The *Titanic*

wreck is supposed to be at 41.7 N. Iceland is at 64.8 N. That's about 1600 miles difference in latitude, or the same as the width of the US, from the tip of Maine to the tip of Florida. There was no drifting ice at

64.8 N from 1900 to 1975, but we are supposed to believe the *Titanic* hit ice in 1912 at 41.7

N?] They have an alleged photo of the iceberg that hit the *Titanic*:



They would need to, wouldn't they, since all the rescue ships could easily photograph the thing? However, that couldn't be a more obvious fake. Nothing about it looks real. Even the water looks fake. There is no resolution, lots of fake pixellation or something, and no depth of field. The light also makes no sense. On your far right, the light appears to be coming from low and right, giving us a bright spot on that small wall. But none of the other facets match that reading, telling us this was faked by someone who had never studied light falling on an object. Wikipedia tells us there is a red spot indicating where the *Titanic* hit it. I see a shadow on the thing, but since the shadow continues on down across the ocean in a line, it can't be either the mark they are talking about, or real. Regardless, the iceberg doesn't look large enough to sink the *Titanic*, surviving with only "a red smudge". That ship had a displacement of above 50,000 tons and a cruising speed of about 25mph. The force of such a collision could easily split an iceberg that size. The *Titanic*'s prow was very pointed, remember, and was the most heavily reinforced part of the ship, for obvious reasons. Prows always are, since they will usually take a first hit.

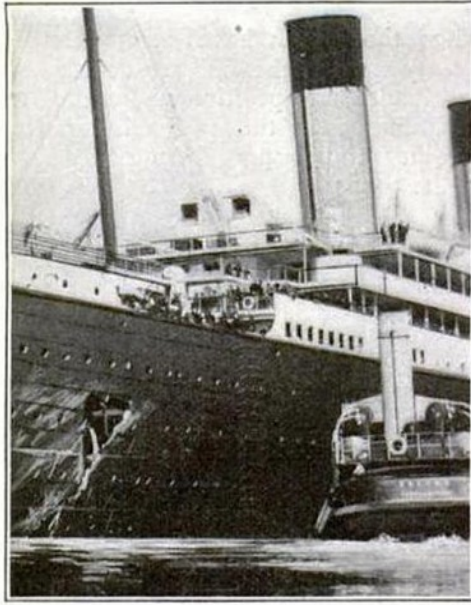
Plus, you have to compare that iceberg to the stories we have been told about the hit. We have many survivor stories, you know. We are told some passengers felt the hit and others didn't. They were asleep and slept through it. So we are led to believe it was a glancing blow by a submerged iceberg, with the ship just passing over it and being ripped into. If the ship had hit an iceberg much larger than it, as hitting a wall, no one would have slept through it, no one would have survived, and no stories

would have been told. If you stop a 50,000 ton object cold from 25mph, the devastation would be enormous, both on the ship and on the iceberg. The iceberg would have pieces of ship buried in for many feet, and other parts would have exploded all over the front of the iceberg. So that photo is just **proof** the story is false and that we are looking at a huge fake.

We are now told the ship simply nudged the far edge of the iceberg with its starboard side, not puncturing the hull, but only breaking the seams of five outer compartments. The ship could only survive the breach of four, we are told in a bit of irony. However, this conflicts mightily with what we are told of the *Titanic*'s miraculous design—and why it was considered unsinkable. These outer compartments were sealed off from inner compartments, so pretty much *all* the outer compartments on the forward starboard could have been breached without sinking the ship. The outer compartments were like bumpers, and they weren't connected to the inner ship. This “unsinkable” idea is now sold as a myth, but even those selling it as a myth admit that White Star VP Franklin called the ship unsinkable. The publicity brochures for the boat called it unsinkable. So it was hardly a myth. And it was basically true. The *Titanic*'s twin *Olympic* was rammed by the 8000 ton military cruiser HMS *Hawke*, crushing the *Hawke* but never imperiling the *Olympic*. These huge ships were built to withstand incredible collisions, and the *Titanic* should have easily withstood the collision, even as it is now sold in the literature. This malarkey about four compartments maximum has no basis in fact: it does not match what was said of these ships before 1912. And besides, if the *Titanic* hit the right edge of that iceberg above, it would *not* compromise more than four compartments. It would also not just leave a little red dot on the iceberg. Whoever composed this story is an idiot, or thinks you are.

Plus, where does the “red” come in? The *Titanic* was red **below** the water line, but black above, and yet they have indicated a red smudge above the water line on that stupid fake iceberg. I now see it is the dot on the far right wall, in the bright patch, about halfway up. But for the iceberg to be large enough to damage the *Titanic*, that dot would have to be twenty or thirty feet up—above the water line. So why would it be red?

As a bonus, I include here the images we are given of the *Olympic* and *Hawke* after the collision.



The Hole in the "Olympic," the Damage Below the Waterline being Much Greater Than That Above



The Bow of the "Hawke," the Damage being so Great That the Ram Has Been Mashed Flat

Strangely, those are fake as well. The picture of the *Hawke* is obviously a painting: look at the funny little men onboard, and note how the water looks like an impressionist painting! The picture of the *Olympic* isn't a painting, but it looks like a manipulated paste-up with fake damage drawn in. If this collision was also a fake, that pushes us down yet another level in the rabbit hole, doesn't it?

And another part of the story falls with our Gulfstream graphic above. The mainstream admits the *Carpathia* arrived less than two hours after the *Titanic* went down. So why couldn't she rescue the people in lifevests as well as the people in boats? Why did the Canadians have to find them all dead a few days later? We are told they froze to death in less than two hours, but our Gulfstream graphic puts the lie to that as well, doesn't it? This was 50 or 60 degree F water, which is quite cold but not cold enough to kill you in less than two hours. So the lie here is huge: the mainstream story tells us the water temp was subfreezing, being  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  or  $28^{\circ}\text{F}$ . Not even close to being true, as we have seen. The *Titanic* was traveling in the warm Gulfstream, which was around  $15^{\circ}\text{C}$  almost all the way across the Atlantic. Even the cooler parts of the Atlantic at that latitude aren't subfreezing on the surface.

Of course the movie *Titanic* was made to push again all these old lies. We saw Leo DiCaprio freezing to death in icy water in a short time, didn't we? Impossible, because he would have been floating in NASA's "warm" Gulfstream at latitude  $41.7^{\circ}\text{N}$ . But they want you to think he was floating at about  $60^{\circ}\text{N}$ , up by Greenland. I am just surprised director Cameron didn't CGI in some polar bears swimming by.

Actually, this idea was used to sell the event. See Daisy Spedden's children's book [\*Polar the Titanic Bear\*](#), published in 1994. Spedden was an American heiress who supposedly survived the *Titanic* and she allegedly wrote the book in 1913 to amuse her 7-year-old son. He allegedly died in a car accident in 1915, boo-hoo, so the book was shelved. It was allegedly found by a relative and published by Little Brown in 1994 and then republished by Scholastic Books in 1998. This by itself indicates we are dealing with another Intel project, since Scholastic Books publishes both *Harry Potter* and the *Hunger Games*. The first *Potter* came out in 1997, the year before Scholastic began pushing this *Polar the Titanic Bear* rubbish.

**[Addendum February 10, 2019:** a reader just sent me to [a cache of Titanic photos](#) from *The Star* (Toronto) from 2012. Most are generic and prove nothing either way, but a couple are proof of the fake.



That's obviously a paste-up/drawing, and it is difficult to believe they still allow it to be released. I assume they need it because it is the only photo in the set specific to the event in any way. The others could have been taken from other events and re-tagged, but this one at least shows people who look cold in lifevests. Unfortunately, they are outlined in a strange a way, and many look drawn or painted. Notice how the boat and oars are outlined, and the hats and scarves of several people are also outlined clumsily.





That one is tagged “Carlos Hurd and his wife”, Hurd being a reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* allegedly on holiday on the *Carpathia* when it rescued *Titanic* survivors. Two problems: 1) that isn't onboard the *Carpathia*, it is in a town square (probably Florence in front of the Duomo). 2) It is also a paste-up. Notice the lighting on the two faces is inconsistent, with his face lit by a sun low to your left, while hers is lit evenly from the front. Or, he has a hot spot to the left, while she doesn't.



That one is tagged as **Stuart** Collett, Christian minister and *Titanic* survivor. Nothing there indicates he is a minister, but we do have indication he is a spook. See the strange hand position in the coat, or the “hidden hand”—indicating the great hoax. ]

Which brings us to the *USS Californian*, famous for failing to respond to flares seen from the *Titanic*. Several inquiries were made into this, but the only possible answer is that the *Californian* was ordered to stand down and not to assist. Ordered by whom? By J.P. Morgan, who owned the Leyland Line as well as the White Star Line. Despite both the British and American inquiries finding that the *Californian* could have saved all or most of those who perished in lifevests, the officers were never charged with negligence or any other crime. They were never sued. This also can only be explained by top-down pressure by the billionaires, who wished to bury this part of the story.

We are told the *Californian* was so close she could see the *Titanic* and the *Titanic* could see her. But we are supposed to believe neither ship was able to signal the other. No one thought to wake the sleeping wireless operator on the *Californian*! Oh, the things they expect you to believe!

The story of the *Californian* has since been tweaked to sell the story that there was ice in the area, and the ship was stopped due to it. But we have seen that was impossible.

Also interesting to my readers is the name of the captain, **Stanley Phillip Lord**. His son Stanley Tutton Lord was a banker in Liverpool. This reminds us of agent Sterling Lord, from my paper on the [Jeffrey MacDonald fake](#), doesn't it? I showed Sterling Lord was from the peerage, and we may assume the same of Stanley Lord. He is not listed in the peerage, but that doesn't mean they aren't related. Lord is very scrubbed, but I did find one possible clue. His wife was a Tutton, and there are Tuttons in the peerage. A Francis Robert Tutton, b. 1874, married Lucy Evans Chavassee, her mother being Frances **Evans**. This is curious because Capt. Stanley Lord's wireless operator was one Cyril Evans, indicating the two men may have been related. In fact, we do find a [Cyril Lloyd Evans](#) in the peerage, possibly of the right age for a match. He is scrubbed, the only thing we know about him being that his daughter's middle name was **Murray**—which may have been her mother's maiden name—and that she married the Baronet **Bowen**. Of course that is a clue, since that name already came up above. See Vice-Admiral Harold Gardiner Bowen of the ONR, possibly linked to Robin Gardiner who wrote the book on the *Titanic* switch. Anyway the first Baronet Bowen ran the Great South Railway in Argentina at the time of our story. His daughter married the son of Lt. Gen. Sir Alexander Cobbe, who in turn was the son of Nuzzeer Begum **Khan**.

[**Added October 3**]: Also remember Walter **Lord**, who published the bestseller *A Night to Remember* in 1955, about the *Titanic* event. He was later a consultant to James Cameron for the 1997 film. Wikipedia admits he was OSS, the precursor to CIA. Lord's mother was a **Hoffman**, making him Jewish, and his grandfather was Richard **Curzon** Hoffman, President of the Baltimore Steam Packet Company—a steamship firm. Do you recognize the name Curzon? We saw it above, didn't we? We

saw the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet Smith/Bromley marrying the daughter of the Viscount Curzon. This pretty much proves Walter Lord was related to all these people.]

What this indicates to me is that Lord and Evans on the *Californian* were related and were both MI5/6. They were planted on the ship specifically to oversee the wreck. Along with the *Carpathia*, they were on hand to make sure the event went as planned. So I don't think Lord was falsely accused, but I do think he was just following orders. Lord didn't pick up anyone because there was no one to be picked up. The *Carpathia* was the designated pick-up ship, and she picked up all crew and cast, leaving no one in the water. The *Californian* wasn't there to pick anyone up, she was there as the coordination vessel, and possibly as back-up. She may have warned off any other ships, telling them this was a military exercise or something.

Then Wikipedia tells us the next stunning lie. The captain of the *Carpathia* described the area around the *Titanic* wreck as a vast ice field with many icebergs and ice floes. If so, then what were all these other ships doing there in the first place? Why was *Carpathia* there at all, and how did she get in to the *Titanic*? Are we supposed to believe she was an icebreaker? We are then told that this area is now called Iceberg Alley. However, all we have to do is take the link to see that isn't the case. Iceberg Alley exists, but it is far to the north. It isn't at 41.7° N, it is in the Labrador Current, up between Newfoundland and Greenland, as I showed you above. It is about 800 miles north of the *Titanic* site, running from the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel to the 60<sup>th</sup>. Tens of thousands of sailors, navy men, geographers, and historians must know this, so why are you having to hear it from me? For that matter, why didn't author Robin Gardiner mention any of this in his “hard-hitting and ground-breaking” book? I think you now know why.

**Continuation, October 7, 2018:** I have been sent by a reader to research William Stead, famous *Pall Mall Gazette* editor who allegedly went down with the *Titanic*. I could insert all this above nearer the sections on Astor or Guggenheim, but even as I go in I can tell it is going to spin out into its own story, so I best tack it on here, where it can expand to any length necessary. Just by skimming Stead's Wiki page, one can tell he was a major spook, and I recommend you do so. And so this entire section will—in my opinion—act as confirmation that these major first-class passengers faked their deaths to a man. Our first clue to Stead's origins is his birth in Embleton, Northumberland. My readers will know that Northumberland is a red flag by itself, and Embleton is just north of Tyne and Wear, a place that has come up many times in my recent research. See for example [my paper on Star Wars star Daisy Ridley](#). We saw that many noble seats were in the area, including the Liddells, Barons Ravensworth—linked closely to Lewis Carroll—and the Earls Grey. Also the Percys, Duke of Northumberland, of course, and the Viscounts Ridley. Also the Viscounts Allendale and the Viscounts Devonport. Also the Barons Hastings. Also the Blacketts, the Ogles, the Selbys, and the **Trevelyan Baronets**—whom we have already seen above. Just to jog your memory, the Trevelyans were closely



related to the Smith Baronets, and therefore to the captain of the *Titanic* Edward Smith. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet Trevelyan was Lord of the **Admiralty** in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and his mother was a **Macaulay**. These Trevelyans lived in Wallington Hall in Northumberland, which is about 15 miles from Embleton. Alnwick Castle, the seat of the Percys, is even nearer, being about five miles from Embleton.

This leads us to search for William Stead in the peerage. Guess what, [there is one listed](#), but he is almost completely scrubbed. All we have is his daughter Emily who died in 1907. That is the right time period. Strangely, Wiki doesn't tell us anything about Stead's family, though it posts a photograph. Geni tells us Stead had two daughters, but neither is named Emily. There, his mother is scrubbed, though we are told she was a Johnson (Wiki says Jobson, to add to the confusion). On the paternal side, his grandmother is also scrubbed, although we are told she was an Earnshaw. Reminds us of *Wuthering Heights*, doesn't it? Stead's grandfather was from Howden, which is about 2 miles from Ravensworth Castle, the seat of the Barons Ravensworth, and William moved to Howden as a young child. Anyway, Emily Stead of the peerage married a Johnstone, which is curiously close to Johnson, the name of our William Stead's mother—leading me to guess the name was fudged at Geni. That guess is given weight when we discover this Johnstone's grandfather was **Vice-Admiral** Sir William Johnstone Hope, who had married the daughter of the Earl of Hopetoun and Lady Elizabeth **Carnegie**—herself the daughter of **Admiral** George Carnegie, Earl of Northesk. I guess you continue to see why finding admirals involved in the backstory of the *Titanic* is important. Also of interest is the wife of Admiral Carnegie, Lady Leslie, daughter of Alexander Leslie, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of **Leven**. I remind you that we saw that name above as well, since the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Leven was a Leslie-**Melville**, related to Capt. Edward Smith of the *Titanic*. Smith's daughter's middle name was Melville, remember? We also saw the name Leven in my paper on Hawking, since his colleague Atiyah was the son of a Leven. Atiyah is the one now claiming to have solved the Riemann hypothesis.

Anyway, since all these names are tightly tied together, we may assume William Stead is related closely to these Steads in the peerage. We also find a Sydney **Vere** Stead in the peerage, scrubbed himself, but with a daughter who married a Montagu, 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Manchester, in 1927. This Duke's mother was a **Zimmerman**, whose mother is not given, though her father was Eugene Zimmerman from Cincinnati. He was a railroad magnate and sat on the board of Standard Oil. His wife was an Evans, which name we also saw above. It ties us to Capt. Stanley Lord of the *Californian* and his wireless operator Cyril Evans. But I paused on the name Vere because it also links us to Millvina Dean above, whose brother was Bertram Vere Dean. We also find a Redmond Vere-Stead in the peerage, whose mother was a **Heineken**.

Also of interest is [Dorothea Stead](#), who married Norman Leslie-Melville in 1918. Leslie-Melville's mother was also a Stead, meaning Dorothea married a cousin. Leslie-Melville's grandmother was a

**Ball**, linking us to George Washington. Edwin Stead married Emily **Hamilton** in 1876, and she was the daughter of the Baronet Hamilton. That name also keeps coming up. The Steads were also related to the Bells, Bennetts and Milners. This links us to Alexander Graham Bell, whose father was a Melville. It also links us back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet Trevelyan, who married Mary Katharine Bell in 1904, the daughter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet Bell.\* The Steads and Milners have been marrying for centuries, with [the first one I found](#) being in 1669.

So this is where William Stead came from. He was closely related to all the other players in the scene, just as we would expect. His bio is the usual pastiche, and reminds us of Mark Twain, Jack London, and many others. He supposedly became editor of the *Northern Echo* newspaper at age 22, coming from nowhere. The *Echo* was founded in 1870 by. . . John Hyslop **Bell**. Which explains Stead's promotion, I guess. Nepotism. Also a big clue is Stead's father-in-law, who Wiki tells us was a merchant and **shipowner**. That sort of ties in here, doesn't it? Geni tells us his name was Henry Wilson, but his wife is not given. He was of the Thomas Wilson Sons Company, AKA Wilson Line of Hull, which merged with the North Eastern Railway in 1906. They had 75 ships by 1903, and were among the largest shipping companies in the world. One of these Wilsons was the Baron Wilson of Nunburnholme, and he may be the Henry Wilson, father of Stead's wife. If so, this would tell us the mother of Stead's wife: Jane Wellesley, of the Dukes of Wellington. So I trust you are starting to see the lay of the land here. Stead wasn't just a newspaper editor, he was tied to shipping in a major way, as well as to the top levels of the peerage.

In his early 30s Stead became editor of the big *Pall Mall Gazette*, where he sold a series of fake stories—just as they do it now. One of these concerned his friend Major-General Charles George Gordon, of the peerage Gordons of course (think George Gordon, Lord Byron). The Gordons were also dukes. Gordon, like his namesake Lord Byron, was gay and a boy chaser, as well as being a major spook. His biggest assignment was being the fall guy in the famous Gordon Relief Expedition hoax of 1884, which Stead sold to the hilt for months. This was a fake war in Sudan against fake Muslims, just like the fake wars in the Middle East and Northern Africa now. Nothing much has changed in over a century. It was waged against the puppet Muhammad Ahmad—the Gaddafi of his time. We are supposed to believe he had declared a Mahdiyya, preparing the way for the second coming of Christ. Because Muslims always prepare the way for a second coming of Christ, right? He also gathered an army of 50,000 to take over Khartoum and liberate Sudan from the whites and Egyptians. As the story goes, the British decided to abandon Sudan and sent Gordon in to oversee the evacuation to Egypt. Instead, Gordon decided to disobey orders and try to save Khartoum with a small garrison. The British then decided to send in Gen. Wolseley (later Viscount and Field Marshall) to relieve him, but assigned only about 5,400 troops to go against 50,000. This is the biggest red flag in this ridiculous story. The next absurdity is that we are told Wolseley hired a few hundred Canadian First Nations “voyageurs” (Natives) to help him paddle *up* the Nile. This insured their progress would be

glacial. Wolseley then split his men, sending only 2,400 by camel to try to reach Gordon before the Muslims did. Sounds like a great idea, right? 2,400 against 50,000? In January 1885, the Muslims allegedly took the city, slaughtering everyone including Gordon. Now get this:

**Two days later the relief expedition entered the city, only to find they were too late.**

No, seriously, that is what it says in the history books. That is what we are taught with a straight face. One question: where were the 50,000 hostiles that had been there two days earlier? Did they just ride off from the city they had just captured? Or did they allow this relief expedition to come in without battle? Strangely, Mohammad Ahmad died six months later at age 40 of typhus, which is convenient. I guess they didn't need him for the part anymore. But for some reason Lord Kitchener came in a few years later and took Sudan back. We aren't told why the British wanted Sudan in 1895, but didn't want it in 1885. They admit that the Great Powers (England, France, Germany, etc.) had controlled Sudan up until that time, planting their puppets as rulers (see Tewfik Pasha). So why the Gordon story? My guess is something was going on in England in 1884 they needed to cover up. So they created this big hoax in the Sudan to fill the headlines for months. That has always been the *modus operandi*, up to the present time. And what was this event in England? I don't know, but it is interesting the Fabian Society was founded in that year. A little research leads me to believe the Sudan story was planted to cover up events in Egypt, not England. See Evelyn Baring, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Cromer, the consul-general of Egypt at the time, overseeing the Egyptian **bankruptcy**. Please note his surname, which links us to Barings Bank. Cromer had *de facto* control over all Egyptian finances and government from 1883, indicating the country was being looted by the banks. The Egyptians had borrowed millions of pounds from British banks to build the Suez canal, then defaulted, turning over the entire country as collateral. To keep this off the front pages, this fake war in Sudan was manufactured, so that people could follow the Gordon saga. And William Stead led the way.

But before we move onto the next Stead hoax, let's go back to Lord Kitchener. Kitchener later became an Earl and Field Marshal, and like Gordon he was gay. His "constant companion" and *aide de camp* was Captain **Oswald Fitzgerald**, who just happened to "die" at the same time and place as Kitchener. And yes, he links us not only to JFK, but to Lee Harvey Oswald—[since Oswald and JFK were related](#). Kitchener had a famous "band of boys" as his constant entourage in the army. Kitchener was also a Cripps, a Fisher, a Clarke, a Green and a Robinson on his father's side. Kitchener's older sister Frances married in 1869 a Parker, whose grandparents were a **Macauley** and a Campbell. This links us to the people above involved in the *Titanic* hoax, including Stead himself. Yes, Stead was related to Kitchener.

Stead's next famous assignment was the Crawford scandal, in which the Baronet Dilke was targeted by his fellow peers for not being enough of a fascist. Amazingly, the Smiths are involved here again, linking us to the rest of this paper. The Baronet's younger brother married the daughter of **shipping**

**magnate** Thomas Eustace Smith. Note that we have another Smith as shipping magnate. There were six Thomas Smiths who became baronets, and our Thomas Smith here is also in the peerage. He married into the Dalrymple Baronets, which also linked him to the **Hamiltons** and Stewarts. Anyway, Baronet Dilke was the lover of this Martha Dalrymple, art patroness wife of Thomas Smith. But he was accused of seducing her daughter from a previous marriage, Virginia Crawford, age 19. Virginia's husband filed for divorce, and the Dilke relationship was put forward by Crawford as evidence. The judge granted the divorce but exonerated Dilke, saying there was no evidence against him. Well, Stead was not satisfied with that, for reasons never given, and began a smear campaign against Dilke. Dilke fought the smear in court, but due to collaboration against him, he lost. It is now admitted the whole thing was a fraud, with Neville Chamberlain's father Joseph and Earl Primrose destroying Dilke on purpose. Primrose's father had been First Lord of the **Admiralty** and Primrose himself would be Prime Minister in 1894-5. Obviously, this indicates Stead was their agent in the media, publishing false information. Given that, you should ask yourself if such a person as Stead would have any problem faking his own death on the *Titanic*, under orders from above. Of course not.

Stead's next fraud was his claiming to purchase a 13-year-old girl. Follow this story if you can. Stead paid an ex-madam to procure Eliza Armstrong for £5. But first she was taken to a female abortionist, who examined the girl and attested to her virginity. The girl was then drugged with chloroform and taken to a brothel to meet Stead. To act the part, Stead first got drunk on champagne, though he was a teetotaler. He entered the room of Armstrong and waited for her to awaken. When she did she screamed, and Stead left—hoping the scream would indicate to those outside he had boinked the girl. She was then turned over to Bramwell Booth, General of the Salvation Army, who took her to France to be taken care of by a family there. Stead then wrote the whole thing up and published it, in order to prove you could buy a girl.

Yep, that is the story they decided to go with, and that they are still telling in the mainstream. You can read it at Wiki. One question would be why Stead thought he needed to get drunk on champagne for this story. Another would be why anyone would think he boinked her just because she screamed, or why he would need anyone to think that. Another would be why she was taken to France. Shouldn't it have been easier to place this girl in England? She didn't speak French, so why send her to France? Obviously, because they needed to get rid of her. If she had been in England someone would have tracked her down and cross-checked this ridiculous story.

We are told Home Secretary Sir William Harcourt begged Stead to cease publication of this lurid story and others to prevent rioting, but Stead refused unless Parliament immediately passed a bill to raise the age of consent to 16. Both Harcourt and Parliament caved, passing the bill. Now, does that sound like a true story to you? You don't think the Home Secretary or Parliament could beat one noisy editor? They couldn't have shut him down or arrested him? To see why that wasn't done, we can look

more closely at Harcourt. His grandfather was the Archbishop of York, and his grandmother was a Leveson- Gower, daughter of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Stafford. Her grandparents were the Egertons, Dukes of Bridgewater, and the Russells, Dukes of Bedford. Harcourt became Chancellor of the Exchequer (banking) in 1886 and again in the 1890s. So he was a major spook even overlooking his time as Home Secretary. This indicates again that the entire Armstrong story was planted by British Intelligence, to make sure this bill passed. And why would they wish to raise the age of consent? So that they could blackmail and control more people. Most men they wished to blackmail were not attracted to girls under 13, so the previous law was bootless in that regard. Girls of that age hadn't even gone through puberty, so most men would find them sexually useless. But with 16 year olds, it was a different story. Some of them were sexually willing creatures, fully capable of putting an older man in a compromising situation on purpose. So these girls could be hired by Intel to do just that. Or I assume that was the point. Other points could probably be discovered with more digging, but this will do for now.

Amusingly, in order to drag the story out even further, Stead had himself arrested and allegedly thrown in Coldbath Prison for three days. We can be sure this was theater as well, since he was prosecuted by Attorney General Webster—of the same families. He then orchestrated protest groups against his fake imprisonment. The abortionist involved in the story was also convicted and allegedly died in jail— although her term was only six months. We can be sure she didn't. Since she was named Mourez, they probably just sent her back to France. Stead then allegedly spent another three months as a first-class inmate at Holloway Prison, where he was allowed to continue to edit the *Pall Mall Gazette*. We are

supposed to believe that would be allowed, and that the owners of the newspaper never considered firing him for drugging and kidnapping this young girl? On the way out, I remind you to notice the name of the head of the Salvation Army: **Booth**. His father had organized it a few years earlier. Were they related to John Wilkes Booth? Of course.

To see how the Booths link to our current question, see 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet Booth of Allerton Beeches, **Liverpool**, director of the Cunard **Steamship** Company—the main rival of the White Star Line. Due precisely to the arrival of White Star in 1902, the British government began to heavily subsidize Cunard. And what does that mean? It means Cunard got to drink straight from the treasury. Baronet Booth was closely related to the Nobles as well as to Maj. Gen. Benjamin Franklin Butler, Governor of Massachusetts. His son was named Ben-Israel, just so you know. And his business partners were Fisher and Webster. The Booths had previously been Barons Delamar, when they were closely related to the Greys (Earls of Stamford) and Egertons (Viscounts Brackley). See the marriage of William Booth and **Vere** Egerton, and note the name Vere once again. The Booths were also related to the Clintons, Earls of Lincoln; the Fiennes, Viscounts of Saye and Sele; and the Cecils, Earls of Exeter. We saw the Fiennes above. In total, there are about 1,100 Booths in the peerage.

For another laugh, I send you to [Abraham Lincoln Booth](#) of the peerage, son of Franklin Booth and Rebecca **Gechter**. These Booths come from Suffolk County, NY, and before that from Dunham Massey, Chester. [They were originally Bothes](#), related to Warburtons and Breretons. So it is the same Booths. But just consider that name Abraham Lincoln Booth, which he got in 1867 in Pennsylvania, two years after the fake assassination. They are pretty much admitting the connection aren't they, as [well as the hoax](#)?

So the Booths and their creations are not to be trusted. Like everything else, the Salvation Army was a huge scam from the beginning, and this just proves it. If you don't believe me, just ask yourself why this alleged Christian organization was modelled on the army. To the best of my recollection, Christ was the *Prince of Peace*. Could the Salvation Army have been modelled on the army because it was another creation of military intelligence? Also ask yourself this: isn't the work of the Salvation Army something that should be done by the government, using our taxes? Aid for the poor, help for drunkards, homes for fallen women and released prisoners: great, but why isn't the government already doing that? Why do we need these private organizations to do what should already be done? I will tell you: to soak you all the more. They spend all your taxes on the military and paying interest to bankers, so they have nothing left for doing real work. So they create these bogus charity organizations to soak you a second time. And these various organizations are just as inefficient and corrupt as the government itself. Whenever one is audited we find most of the money unaccounted for. You might as well just send your donation directly to the bankers. These organizations weren't founded by banking families by accident, you know.

Here's a nice painting of William Booth:



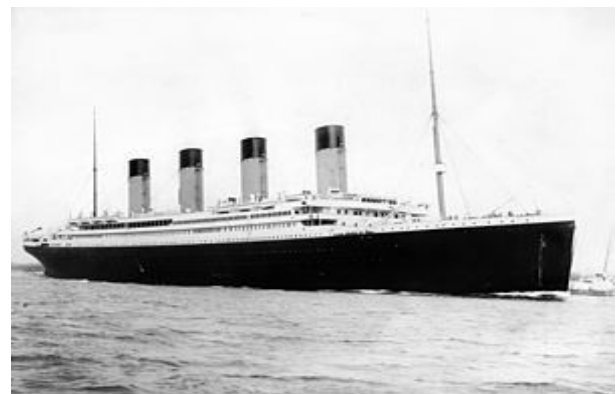
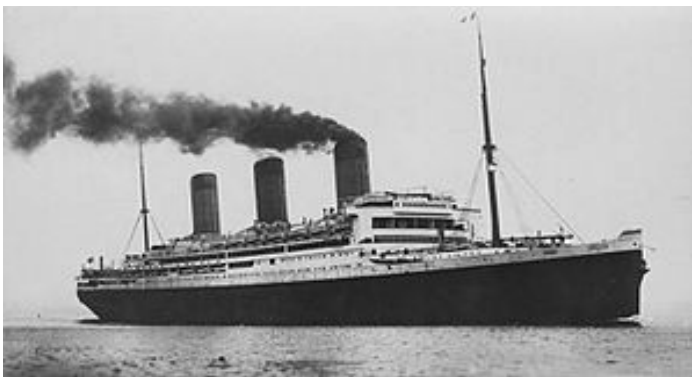
Do I need to tell you what to look at? His mother was a Moss, from a wealthy family. They admit he got his nose from his mother, but then try to tell us she wasn't Jewish. OK. He was born in Nottingham. But wait, we saw that above, didn't we? The Smith Baronets, close relatives of Capt. Edward Smith of the *Titanic*, were from Nottingham. They founded Smith Bank of Nottingham and George Smith was also Sheriff of Nottingham. Booth was also linked to Stead in another way: Stead helped Booth write *In Darkest England*, and some even claim he ghost wrote it. You should also know that Booth's son Bramwell married a Soper, whose mother was a **Levick**. That is Jewish, being a variant of Levi.

But we aren't finished with this scumbag agent Stead. In the 1890s he was hired to promote the spiritualism movement—a spook promoting spooks. In the quarterly *Borderlands*, Stead claimed to be in contact with the spirit world, bringing us much wisdom from beyond. Even here we have the hidden family links. See Stead's promotion of spirit photography, where he claimed to publish the photo of the ghost of deceased soldier Piet **Botha**. The story is not worth responding to beyond that, but just notice the name Botha. Botha=Booth. They are both in the peerage, being from the same lines. Which gives you a new way to look at the Bothas of South Africa.



Speaking of South Africa, Stead was closely tied to Cecil Rhodes, being his friend and confidant. Stead is said to have mentored Rhodes, passing along many of his ideas of government. This is interesting, because Rhodes was tight with Viscount Alfred **Milner**, who founded the famous Round Table. Rhodes was gay and Milner probably was, too, marrying late in life to a 47-year-old society lady and having no children. The Round Table was physically held at Plas Newydd, **Lieutenant Colonel** Charles Paget's estate in. . . **Anglesey**, of course. Paget was the Marquess of Anglesey, remember? And why do I bold the name Milner? Well, we saw it above, didn't we? The Steads and Milners of the peerage have been marrying for centuries. My best readers will also remember Yuri Milner, [who I wrote about many years](#) ago on my science site. He is the Russian billionaire who funds the Fundamental Physics Prize. So we continue to learn more about his background, don't we?

And, most of you know the story of the *Titan*, from an 1898 novella by Morgan Robertson. It was a fictional account preceding the wreck of the *Titanic*, foretelling it in many ways. What is less known is Stead's 1892 story "From the Old World to the New", in which a ship called the *Majestic* rescues passengers from an iceberg collision. So I guess we now know where the malarkey about icebergs in the Gulfstream comes from. What's even stranger is that White Star Lines came out with their own *Majestic* after the war. This ship was a *Titanic* look-alike except it had one less smokestack. At Wiki, we are told it was a German ship "laid down" in 1913, **less than a year** after the *Titanic* allegedly sank. It was originally named the *SS Bismarck* of the Hamburg America Line. Although it launched in 1914, **it never sailed due to the war**, but was awarded in mysterious circumstances to Great Britain in 1920 as part of war reparations for the German sinking of the *HMHS Britannic*. While the *Titanic* was constructed by Harland and Wolff in Belfast Harbor, the *Majestic* was allegedly built by Blohm and Voss in Hamburg. So it is strange they look so much alike:



I don't know about you, but to me it looks like they just removed the forward smokestack and built another level on top. On **Cutting through the Fog** forum, I suggested maybe the *Titanic* wasn't sunk, only being relocated to the Far East. But on further research, it looks like they didn't even bother

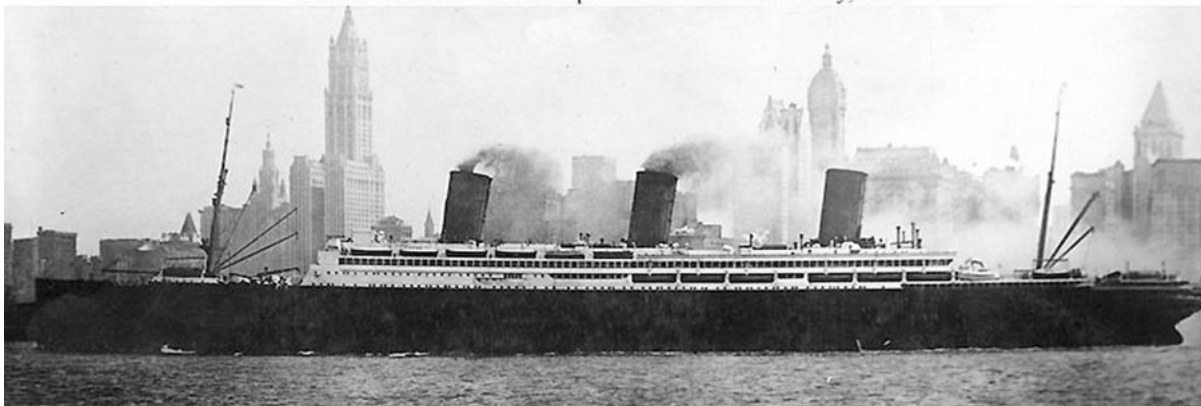


sending her to Russia or China. They just sent her to Hamburg port for the war, and then brought her back in 1920. You will tell me the *Majestic* is supposed to be 50 feet longer or so, but who measures these ships? Have you?

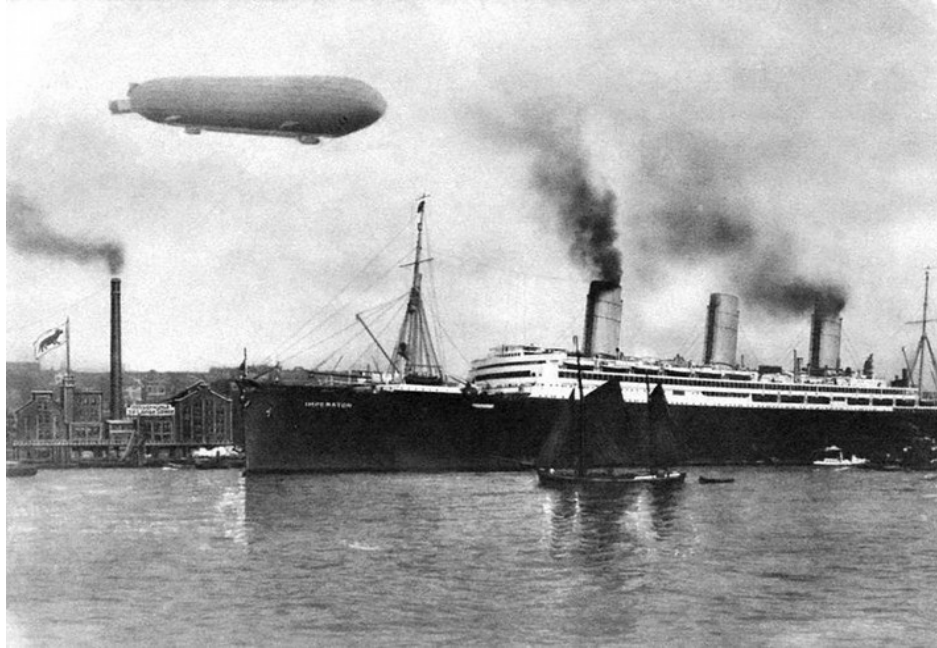
Also interesting is that the *Majestic* was bought jointly from the British Government by the White Star and Cunard lines, which tells us something important: they were no longer competitors. Take note that Cunard brings the Booths into it as well. Furthermore, White Star and Cunard also bought the SS *Imperator*, another German *Titanic* clone that was only 24 feet longer. That's only a 2% difference, invisible to the naked eye. You would have to measure them on site to tell the difference. The *Imperator* was launched in 1912. . . after April of course. We are told the *Imperator* was mothballed in Hamburg for almost five years, and then was taken after the war by the US in the Allied Agreement. She was sailed to the US, but for some reason not given was immediately decommissioned and given back to the British. She was taken charge of by a Capt. Charles A. **Smith**, who sailed her back to Liverpool. What an amazing coincidence, right? Another Capt. Smith. Couldn't be our old Edward Smith under an alias, could it? If not, you can be sure it was a nephew or something.

Want to know what the *Imperator* looked like outside New York City?

Photo # NH 94 USS *Imperator* off New York City, 1919



Gee, it looks exactly like the *Titanic*, with the smokestacks moved. It also looks like a paste-up. If it is the *Titanic*, they would change a few things in the paste to throw you off. The *Imperator* had previously been to New York in June 1913, on its maiden voyage. So the *Titanic* may have finally made it to NYC a bit more than a year after its fake sinking. They also admit the *Imperator* got many makeovers, both before and after 1913. In October of that year, the smokestacks were reduced in height, allegedly to help her center of gravity, which was too high. But wait. Shorter smokestacks would weigh less, further *raising* her in the water, so the story makes no sense. The real problem is that she was riding too high in the water, and lowering the smokestacks would be counterproductive. So this may be further indication of the fraud. Here's more:



That's supposed to be the *Imperator* leaving Hamburg. Oh my god, what a hamhanded fake that is! Let's see, a fake zeppelin, a fake sailboat with black sails, a fake flag flying as product placement, and a fake smokestack on the shore casting no reflection in the water. Amazing! The zeppelin kind of reminds us of the fake Lindbergh flying over Paris, doesn't it?

**Added January 19, 2019:** Which brings us to the end. The *Titanic* never sank at all. It was simply refitted and stored in Hamburg during the war, posing as the *Imperator*. So Robin Gardiner's title is correct: *Titanic: the Ship that Never Sank*. Now that we are at the end of our investigation, you can notice that he told you the truth, while misleading you into thinking the *Olympic* sank instead. No, no ship sank that day. The whole story was a hoax, run as cover for a series of insurance scams far beyond the one he suggests.

“But what about the ship on the bottom of the sea, that we have seen footage of from Robert **Ballard**?” you will scream. Also faked. Ballard is another from these families, and his bio is likewise full of red flags. His mother is scrubbed at Wikipedia. His father was chief engineer of the minuteman missile program (ICBM), another fake. Robert was commissioned out of ROTC into Naval **Intelligence**. He was liaison between ONR and Woods Hole. The footage of the *Titanic* wreckage is faked, which becomes obvious once you study the story for sense. Lead-ups to the mission in 1979-80 were funded by British billionaire Sir James Goldsmith (Goldschmidt), a Jewish banker of course. His family founded the bank that became BNP Paribas. They are closely related to the **Rothschilds, Bourbons, and Khans**. This links Goldsmith to the other players in the *Titanic* fraud. He was involved with other scams before this *Titanic* wreckage scam, being part of SlaterWalker when it was “rescued” by the Bank of England in the banking crisis of the 1970s. He

became Chairman of SlaterWalker *after* the bailout. For this rape of the British taxpayer he was knighted. He soon became one of the most hated corporate raiders in the world, known for union busting and shady dealing. He retired to Mexico in 1987, beating the market crash of that year. He later became involved in fake environmentalism, used as a cover for more treasury dips.

In the early 80s, another billionaire got involved. Texas oilman Jack Grimm—who had previously funded expeditions to find the hole at the north pole, as well as to find Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster—led the way this time, taking a monkey named Titan onboard to tell him how to navigate. The monkey actually did find the ship, according to the mainstream story, since Ballard used Grimm's mission for his coordinates. Some say the monkey didn't come on the final voyage, but since all the stories are fiction, it hardly matters. In the final analysis, anyone onboard was a monkey.

If that isn't enough to blow the whole story, simply read the [Titanic wreck](#) page at Wikipedia. There we learn that the wreckage is too fragile to be saved or lifted, and that it is now protected by UNESCO convention. Convenient. We learn that although it has survived a century on the sea floor, it is expected to disintegrate very soon.

A newly discovered species of rust-eating bacterium found on the ship has been named [Halomonas titanicae](#), which has been found to cause rapid decay of the wreck. Henrietta Mann, who discovered the bacteria, has estimated that the *Titanic* will completely collapse possibly as soon as 2025. . . . Analysis by Henrietta Mann and Bhavleen Kaur, both of [Dalhousie University](#) in [Halifax, Nova Scotia](#), in conjunction with other scientists and researchers of the [University of Seville](#) in Spain, has determined that the wreck of *Titanic* will not exist by 2037 and that preservation of *Titanic* is impossible. "Unfortunately, because *Titanic* is 2.3 miles down, it is very difficult or impossible to preserve. It is film which will preserve it for history now," says Mann. "It has already lasted for 100 years, but eventually there will be nothing left but a rust stain on the bottom of the Atlantic... I think *Titanic* has maybe 15 or 20 years left. I don't think it will have too much longer than that." [[citation needed](#)] Other scientists have estimated that *Titanic* will last no longer than 14 years, as of 2017.

Also convenient, since it prevents later forensics. Note how the estimates for a complete disappearance of the wreckage keep getting moved up, with the last date mentioned being 2031. Both statements conflict with other parts of the story, don't they, where we are shown "remarkably well preserved interiors", with chandeliers still hanging from the ceilings. So we are supposed to believe the steel eating bacteria weren't hungry from 1912 to 1990, but suddenly got famished in the last decade or so. As soon as the Jewish bankers had unloaded all the salable crap off the wreck and installed it in Las Vegas, the hungry bacteria arrived in force. What a coincidence.

We are told the coordinates given by the *Titanic*'s distress signals were inaccurate, explaining why the wreckage wasn't found there, but that makes no sense. More likely, the wrong coordinates are now being published to explain why the wreckage wasn't found earlier, and to prevent other private parties

from blowing this project. The “right coordinates” are given only to those who can be trusted to continue to propel the hoax. They are sent to coordinates in a lake a few miles east of Glendale, where our teams from Hollywood have located their sets.

Also notice this major discontinuity in the story: When Ballard was trying to raise part of C-deck in the late 1990s, he was accompanied by cruise ships filled with people keen to watch history. These included celebrities like Burt Reynolds and Buzz Aldrin. Note that all mention of iceberg alley has now disappeared. Did any of these ships have to be on the lookout for rogue icebergs? Of course not. You will say that is because this was in the summer, but in the real iceberg alley that wouldn't matter. [Where icebergs exist, they exist all year long.](#)

Here's another snag in the story you are told: Although the Navy is supposed to have funded the initial expedition of Ballard that discovered the wreckage, when this section of C-deck was finally recovered, it wasn't exhibited at the Smithsonian or some such place, as one would expect. Rather, it is exhibited at Luxor Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. We are told this is because the piece is owned by RMS Titanic, Inc., but that makes no sense. If Ballard was initially working for the Navy, the wreckage should belong to the US Government, and thereby American taxpayers. They should be able to view the wreckage for free at a National Museum of History. Notice that in the mainstream story, this glitch is never explained. How exactly did this go from being a Navy project to a private project? Did the US Government sell its rights to these artifacts, and if so for how much? Did the money go into the treasury, lowering your tax bill? Of course not, since nothing was recovered. It was just manufactured and antiqued somehow.

Here's another problem: in the Wikipedia section on “Condition and deterioration of the wreck”, they admit that it is completely dark at those depths. But above, we were told the wreck was found not by sonar but by visual cameras [see the section on “Discovery”]. They illustrate this section with this photo:



which fools you into thinking visual cameras would work for wide-area scanning. But that photo was taken near the surface. In the pitch black depths, the problem would be lighting for the cameras, wouldn't it? At those depths and pressures, light doesn't penetrate very far, so even insanely bright floods would fail after a few feet. Which is simply to say that you couldn't use visual cameras to scan the ocean floor. It wouldn't be possible, so we know the story is false. They are lying.

This is also how you can tell the underwater footage is fake. The wreckage is said to be at 12,500 feet, but in the films that have been published, the lighting contradicts that. The light penetrates the water far too well, indicating they are filming at much lower depths—where the pressures are much less. If you don't want to watch hours of footage, just watch [this five minute video](#) on youtube. It isn't convincing at all, since nothing looks right. Everything is far too small. The prow looks ridiculously small. And there is no sea life. I guess you are supposed to believe the ocean is dead at that depth, but it isn't. You will tell me everything was scared away by the light, but of course creatures at that depth can't detect light, since there normally isn't any. I assume they had to film somewhere where all life had been removed, since they couldn't fake it. They couldn't very well capture a lot of live deepwater fish and other creatures and insert them into this fake film shot in a lake. Nor could they allow native life to encroach on their production here, since that would prove they weren't at 12,500 ft. So apparently they walled off some patch of water somewhere and cleared it of all life.

Some saw that problem later, which is why you can witness a shrimp CGI'ed into this History Channel [footage](#). See minute 50:31. That is *Titanic at 100: Mystery Solved*, in case that particular link gets broken, as I predict it will. That is just pathetic, since any fool can tell that isn't a real shrimp. The fake even comes up in comments, so I am not the only one who noticed it.

This is also why they now claim that

It used to be thought that the depths of the ocean were a lifeless desert, but research carried out since the mid-1980s has found that the ocean floor is teeming with life and may rival the tropical rainforests for [biodiversity](#).<sup>[92]</sup> . . . The Canadian geophysicist Steve Blasco has commented that the wreck "has become an oasis, a thriving ecosystem sitting in a vast desert".

They really can't keep their stories straight, can they? Is the ocean floor a desert or tropical rainforest? And since they have admitted the ocean floor is teeming with life, they still need to explain why we don't see any in the films. The texts now *tell* us the life is there. . . but we don't see it. We should just trust them, I guess. Here's your next laugh:

When the debris field was surveyed in Robert Ballard's 1986 expedition, pairs of shoes were observed lying next to each other on the sea bed.<sup>[98]</sup> The flesh, bones, and clothes had long since been consumed but the [tannin](#) in the shoes' leather had apparently resisted the bacteria, leaving the shoes as the only markers of where a body had once lain.

So, we are supposed to believe that leather isn't an organic substance when surrounded by seawater? It turns to plastic and becomes inedible, even for bacteria. Of course this is absurd, since they just told us that all organic material was the first to go. Obviously, they now regret placing those shoes in the debris field, and are trying to cover that magnificent blunder. We are supposed to believe the bacteria don't like the tannin in the leather. OK.

In the next paragraph they try to explain a similar anomaly: the furniture filmed in the first class reception area. They tell us it was teak and so saltwater and bacteria have no effect on it. Right. All the steel will be gone by 2031, but I guess that teak will still be looking new for centuries. Same for that "mattress still on the bed and the intact and undamaged dresser behind it". We are supposed to forget that mattresses in 1912 were made of organic matter. Maybe we are supposed to believe that all mattresses back then were heavily impregnated with tannins?

The Wikipedia page just goes on and on like that, assuming you are a complete moron who will believe anything.

**Added June 21, 2023:** This paper has caused them such headaches over the past five years, they have finally instructed CIA to manufacture a new fake story to resell the old one. So this week you are being treated to the loss of the tourist sub, with a storyline taken from the "child lost down a well" tales we see occasionally. The point is to make you think a ship is really down there, and that these wealthy tourists have paid \$250,000 to go see the wreckage. Most people can't imagine they would fake a tragedy like this just to resell an old story, so it works much better than just releasing more fake

pictures of the wreckage. A tragedy guarantees them much better headlines. Unfortunately, this just gives them the opportunity to make more mistakes I can catch them at. It creates more anomalies I can point to. Others are already pointing out the sub doesn't even look real, especially the specs and the interior. It seems more like a Hollywood prop. It is guided by a \$30 plastic game controller you can get at Ebay, a knockoff of a knockoff. The interior lighting is by Camper World. [We have on video a reading of the contract](#), admitting the sub is not approved or certified by any regulatory body, just proving the whole thing is a fake. And they want you to see this, because it is part of the conjob. As we have seen many times, there appears to be something in their Phoenician contracts requiring them to tell you they are conning you while they are doing it, so it is *your* bad. If you are too stupid to hear what they are telling you, that isn't their fault.

Notice in that same video that “there is only one button” inside the sub. You may have thought this was high-tech, with a panel of computers, sensors, emergency valves, pressure gauges, and so on. Nope. The CEO/captain tells us with a sh8t-eating grin that it is like a water elevator, with just an up/down button. Right. The interviewer has the same oily grin the whole time, since neither man can contain his mirth at the transparent stupidity of this whole fake. “I couldn't help noticing how many pieces of this sub seemed. . . improvised,” he says with a chuckle. Improvised? Or Hollywood facsimiles?

What I have seen no one else comment on is the censorship of a [5-year-old video by Reuters](#), with reporter Thuy Ong, on this sub. Reuters has deleted it and they even got to it at Bitchute. There is a listing there but the link is broken. [A link to the same video is broken at Yahoo](#). Some information there they don't want me to see. Finally I found [this written transcript](#), which explains why they deleted the video. There they are reporting that the sub **Titan is scheduled to undergo deep-sea certification dives in the Bahamas in April.**

Do you see the problem? In the more recent videos, they admit that the contract tourists have to sign includes the fact that the sub is NOT CERTIFIED.

**The submersible is equipped with a real-time monitoring system to monitor the condition of its pressure vessel during those deep dives. Nine acoustic sensors and 18 strain gauges will keep tabs on the cylindrical carbon-fiber hull and its interface with the titanium domes on each end.**

18, eh? Aces and eights, Chai.

Another problem in that 2018 article is the price tag, which is listed at \$105,129. Doesn't match the current stories, which use the number \$250,000. We haven't had inflation of 2.4x since 2018. And why that silly number 105129? Because it adds to 18 again.



What about laughing boy Stockton Rush, the head of OceanGate who finds his own deathtrap so amusing? He comes from the Stocktons, Rushes, and Davies, all superwealthy Phoenician families. He descends directly from Ralph K. Davies, director of Standard Oil of California under the Rockefellers. He was the head of government oil production during WWII. Later he became the head of American President Lines (the shipping juggernaut), making the Phoenician connection very obvious. Rush's father Richard Stockton Rush was head of Peregrine oil and was a President of San Francisco's famous Bohemian Club. The current Rush comes out of McDonnell-Douglas, one of the largest defense contractors. His wife is Wendy Weil, and her grandfather was president of Macys. "In an eerie twist of fate" she is the great-granddaughter of Isador and Ida Strauss, owners of Macys, and 1<sup>st</sup> class passengers on the *Titanic*. What a coincidence! Or not. These fakes run in families, and these people never quit. This is just another reminder everyone involved in the current fake is also Jewish. Wendy Weil is a close cousin of singer King Princess.

One of the passengers, billionaire Hamish Harding (a cousin of the President and Tonya?), is a professional fake tourist, kind of like [the Garriots we saw in my papers on the fake Hawking](#). Harding has already pretended to go into space on Bezos' Blue Origin dildo, [and we know that is fake](#). He has claimed to have gone to the Mariana Trench as well, so we may assume that is another fake.

After the 2018 videos and articles hit the press, Rush was allegedly sent a letter of warning from a professional society of ocean engineers, voicing concern, especially regarding [his refusal to allow any independent third party to test the vessel](#). That just means they weren't aware the whole thing was a hoax. Obviously, the reason Rush couldn't allow any real ocean engineer to test the vessel is that it is just a Hollywood prop. [Like the \*Spirit of St. Louis\*, it is nothing but a joke.](#)

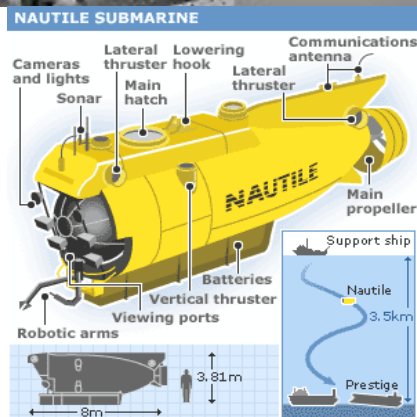


Just look at it! It looks nothing like any real submersible I have ever seen. We are told the main shell is carbon fiber, and it looks to be rather thin. It can't be thick or there would be no room inside for



five men. And those rivets look ridiculous as well. Plus, that tapered point is an obvious design flaw, since it would focus stress at that point. And finally, the front part being titanium while the rest is carbon fiber is absurd, since they will respond to huge pressure in a different way. If real, that seam where they meet would surely break.

The pressure down there is around 6,000psi, which would crush that thing like a soda can. Compare it to the old *Nautilus*, which also supposedly went down to the *Titanic* in the 1980s.



That was also fake, but it was a slightly more believable fake, since the *Nautilus* was a real submersible. It couldn't go to 12,000 ft., but it wasn't just a prop. Reminding you of that may help, since it should make you ask, "Where are the lights on the new one?" Without lots of light, the trip is just wasted. Maybe they didn't include them because they don't want you to ask how those lights can survive that pressure. The answer: they can't. The lights you see on the *Nautilus* couldn't survive 6,000psi or 380atm. They would all be crushed at much lower pressures.



[That's another problem.](#) because it doesn't match the film where Rush is inside the thing, from the front.



Forget the rear area, the seam to the side at head height isn't even the same. In the second image, it is just a line. In the first it is a width. Busted.

So, will these rich guys resurface in the next couple of days? My guess is no. This fake looks to have been planned for several years. One point of it was to resell the *Titanic* fake, but another point is

probably to cash out some life insurance policies for these old guys. Possibly these guys didn't get the "do not take" memo on the vaccines, and are already dead of blood clots. This way their families can earn maximum profits on their demises. Or maybe they were just ready to retire to their private islands and wanted a bit of fun on the way out.

**Next day:** Well, I was right, all rich guys lost to the deep. Boo-hoo. And strangely, the report of their deaths is mostly a reselling of the *Titanic* story. [As you see here at Breitbart](#), which is just running the standard press release, they report finding the wreckage, **but do not show it to us**—though they sent down a robotic craft with camera. More importantly, more than half the article is devoted to retelling us the story of the *Titanic*, hammering in those old nails one more time. But the nails will no longer hold after my prying them out of the rotten wood.

They are telling us the bodies are unrecoverable. That's convenient isn't it? I guess the implosion supposedly atomized them. Turned them into soup. Except that that isn't the way it works. The bodies would be squashed, yes, but there is nothing to prevent them from being recovered. They should be inside the squashed tube, and you just raise it. James Cameron is doing his best to sell this as real, but he is the one that made the fake movie, trying to convince you it was freezing cold in that water in mid-April in the warm Gulfstream. When in fact they were only as far north as Boston, and the surface water temperature was about 70F, warmer than the surf on the Boston beaches. Also note the number of descents Cameron has allegedly taken, in the newest reports: 33. And why does the Navy keep talking about a debris field? There is no debris field with the implosion of a tiny sub. An explosion or break-up causes a debris field. An implosion is simply the crushing of the thing: *no debris field*. And what about that tapping at 30-minute intervals? Are they going to tell us what that was about? They now admit the sub imploded on initial descent in the first hours, telling us they heard a bang. So what was the later tapping? A deep-sea squid playing cowbell? Obviously the scriptwriters just made that up to drag this out, it being more proof the whole thing was fiction.

**Added June 27, 2023:** More evidence continues to come in the mini submersible was just a Hollywood facsimile. [Stockton Rush is on video](#) bragging about buying expired carbon fiber from Boeing for his sub. That's weird enough, since this rich guy should have wanted the best materials. Weirder still that he would undercut the confidence of his clientele by admitting that on video. He should have wished to confirm the safety of the sub, but he does everything he can in these videos to undermine confidence. Very suspicious, but we would expect it in a fake because he needs to foreshadow the failure, making it seem more likely or even inevitable. But it gets even weirder because Rush claimed Boeing also collaborated with him on the sub's design. But when contacted, Boeing shot down both claims: it never collaborated with him on anything, and didn't sell him any carbon fiber. So Boeing has now confirmed this is all one more fake.

So has top submarine expert Patrick Lahey, who is now on record calling the sub a “monstrosity”. Unfortunately, I would guess he is part of the fake, since his comments now make the tragedy look like it is due to gross negligence, rather than the utter fraud it is. He should be able to spot this as a fake in about five seconds, so the fact he is not pointing to a hoax is just part of the con.

\* His mother was a Pattinson, linking us to current vampire actor Robert Pattinson.

# Miles Mathis

## *blurb*



Miles Mathis, proud recipient of the 1997 Youngest Curmudgeon Award, is the author of several romance novels/self-help books, including the yet-to-be-released *How to Get up and Put on your Pants* and the yet-to-be-typed **FONTS** as a Literary Device. In his spare time he enjoys raising turtles from guppies and making new species out of irradiated jello. His most recent science project concerns using a Ouija board to communicate with the living (a method he feels must be superior to existing methods). If you would like to ask Mr. Mathis a question about art, science, raising guppies, or changing the fonts on your Ouija board, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to yourself, then put a letter in it. If you say something half-way intelligent, he will try to contact you through a medium.